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Learning Opportunities in the Workplace

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Learning Opportunities in the Workplace** submitted by Cheryl Boychuk-Lapp in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Adult and Higher Education.

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april 12, 1999

Dedication

The completion of my degree and the writing of this thesis

could not have been completed without continual, magnanimous support from

my husband, Roy Lapp.

I dedicate this thesis to him because of his devotion to my education

and to show my appreciation for all that he has done.

Abstract

This naturalistic study examined perceptions regarding circumstances that constituted the creation of workplace learning opportunities by exploring issues surrounding direction and support of employees' learning. To this end, perspectives from executives and front-line employees of one for-profit, privately owned organization were explored.

Data were collected by using semi-structured interviews with two executives and three front-line employees. These data were analyzed deductively and inductively in preparation to address the research questions.

This study's findings showed that the organization's executives generally supported employees' learning by sharing authority to control learning processes and by creating a learning atmosphere.

Recommendations are made to point to areas where support for employees' self-directedness in learning for the workplace could be improved in the organization and where the literature could be augmented to show management theory and adult learning theory interdependence.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Some companies supply employees with access to learning opportunities in the form of training and development (T&D) programs to improve individual performance, which, in turn, is meant to improve and increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Gagne & Medsker, 1996; Kim, 1993; Stamps, 1996). The background information to the study defines T&D and provides a sketch of why it has been perceived by some human resource development professionals and experts in adult education to be unsuccessful for meeting organizational goals (Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Gayeski, 1996; Geber, 1995; Gordon, 1997; Tomlin, 1997). This discussion is followed by the identification of the related, main research questions. This chapter ends with definitions of main research terms as they have been operationalized in this study.

Background

Because *training* and *development* have been considered as two mutually exclusive terms by some authors (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright, Mondy, & Noe, 1996), the first part of this section deals with training and the second with development, as separate entities. The third portion of this discussion provides an umbrella definition for T&D.

Training

Training was defined by Ravid (1987; cited in Marsick, 1987) as a "pre-planned educational activity, usually designed by the organization, to further the learning of employees and improve work performance" (p. 101). Rothwell and Sredl (1992) considered training to be a "short term learning intervention intended to establish—or improve—a match between present job requirements and individual knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 4). Training has been used to bridge performance gaps, or the "distance" between actual and desired performance. These gaps are minimized when employees are able to learn by attaining the right information at the right time and by applying it in the right way to their existing jobs. Training is the organization's vehicle for supplying employees with new information in the hope that they will use what they

have learned to improve real-time or current work practices. It has been conceived as an organizational tool to further organizational effectiveness and efficiency by transforming individual learning outcomes into operational gains at the micro (job) level of work (Bassi, 1997).

Development

Development "involves a longer-term focus that looks beyond today and today's job by preparing employees to keep pace with the organization as it changes and grows" (Wright, Mondy, & Noe, 1998, p. 192). Whereas training is perceived to apply to the currently held job or micro levels of employee learning, development is concerned with the macro level because it relates to the employee's ability to sustain work within the same organization over time (Day & Copithorne, 1995). Development is an "intermediate-term learning intervention intended to help individuals qualify for advancement and thus achieve future career goals" (Rothwell & Sredl, 1992, p. 5). Developmental programs might help employees to attain promotions—jobs with higher levels of responsibility and compensation with upward, vertical moves through the same organization.

Training and Development

For the purpose of this study, training and development were considered to be inextricably linked because both terms relate to all activities which help the employee to sustain work at any level of the organization. Together, training and development (T&D) act as catalysts to improve employees as organizational resources (Nadler, 1989; cited in Watkins, 1995). T&D programs are usually implemented to effect learning; specifically, the employee's acquisition of knowledge, skills, or attitudes. For this study, T&D is defined as any set of circumstances which the company supplies to facilitate employees' learning with a view to ultimately effecting organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

T&D Characteristics

Canadian companies have had a history of providing minimal investments into T&D. Although most organizations have to provide some form of on-the-job training for employees who are new to a job, many others do not go out of their way to supply T&D which would extend to developing the individual at a macro level at work. Macro level T&D processes help the individual obtain promotions into jobs with more responsibility, accountability, and higher levels of compensation. Wilson (1996) pointed out that only about 25% of larger Canadian firms offer macro T&D to their employees, and those which did tended to focus T&D efforts on those employees who were already highly educated (Wright et al., 1998). The following section discusses (a) the intended purposes of T&D, and (b) issues surrounding the lack of T&D provisioning by many organizations in Canada.

Purposes for T&D

Organizations sponsor T&D programs with a view to improving employees' competency levels which would, in turn, lead to process improvements because employees should be able to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently after applying learning outcomes. The primary purpose for T&D is to improve and increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency by first improving individual performance and productivity (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996).

T&D is also used to transmit company culture, missions, and goals to employees in order create a cohesive work group, one which works together to meet organizational objectives. Those companies which make concerted efforts to develop their employees at both micro and macro levels are actually convincing employees to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for helping the organization to succeed (Cosgrove & Speed, 1995). Marsick and Watkins (1992, 1996) believed that organizations which supply opportunities for continuous learning empower people toward a collective vision to meet organizational goals. Participation in

company-sponsored T&D programs activates reinforcement of company culture and goal congruency between the employee and the employer.

T&D Management

T&D processes in this information age are still seen to be highly influenced by mechanistic and scientific management techniques which were fostered during the industrial age (Bierema, 1996; Rothwell & Sredl, 1992). Both were highly concerned with the issues of authority and control and, specifically, who was able to control whom and what in the workplace.

Mechanistic management viewed front-line (nonmanagement) workers as extensions of the machines on which they worked. Because managers had the authority to control the machines, they also perceived that they had the right to control the workers. Employees did not have the authority to control any portions of the work process when the philosophy of mechanistic management was put into practice because management thought that they were too immature and incompetent to make decisions in this regard.

The posits under scientific management stated that organizations would be most effective and efficient if front-line employees were not able to interfere by making decisions for the organization. All decision making for all facets of the production process was to be done by management, those who became ultimately accountable for accepting both the positive and negative consequences of their decisions. The work environment was characterized as being highly authoritarian, with front-line employees deferring to the decisions made by those with position power and line authority. The consequence of such an environment was that employees felt that they were being separated from their work processes because they no longer had the ability to control any segment of their own production. Employees were not motivated to perform at higher levels because they felt alienated (Krahn & Lowe, 1988) or unable to contribute fully to the success of the organization. Scientific management decreased the "stake" employees had in the company because they were not accountable for decisions which others had made for them.

Participative management mitigates the negative consequences of mechanistic work schemes and centralized (management) decision making by introducing higher degrees of decentralization and empowerment for employees. Participative management, or the balancing of decision-making power between management and front-line employees, means that employees are trusted to make and implement decisions for the company without high levels of management intervention or direction. Basic participative management tenets and practices are seen to motivate employees to perform at higher levels. Employees who are encouraged to help manage work processes are more likely to take responsibility and accountability for their actions when they have some decision-making power and control afforded to them by management (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996). Participative management increases the employees' stake in the organization.

Employer-controlled T&D programs are now known to be largely ineffective because they are still influenced by mechanistic management philosophies, which decreases or sometimes eliminates employees' control over their learning processes (Bierema, 1996; Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Palmer, 1992; Watkins & Marsick, 1992). It appears that employees might consider learning to be a genuine opportunity only when their needs of achieving some authority and control over their learning processes are met. In order for T&D programs to be effective, they need to be managed more participatively with a balance of control between the manager and employee or between the "teacher" and "learner" (Garrison, 1997). "Sole reliance on courses, seminars, and other traditional forms of training is impractical in face of the changing nature and scope of learning needs in today's workforce" (Ravid, 1987; cited in Marsick, 1987, p. 105).

Identification of the Problem

Garrison (1997) stated that learners need to have the authority to control personal learning processes so that they will obtain meaningful knowledge which is more likely to be applied. Many organizations are not always willing to create a set of circumstances which will

help employees to learn in this regard because (a) managers have a history of being solely responsible for determining what employees should learn for the organization, (b) management does not believe that employees are competent or confident enough to choose learning activities which will benefit them and the organization simultaneously, and (c) management believes it is not the front-line worker's role to decide how the organization will develop through employees' learning. "A critical element in determining the benefits and costs of collaborative programs is the assumption of risk. Moving beyond coordination to collaboration requires addressing the 'terrible T's of tradition, trust, and turf'" (Cox, 1974; cited in Taylor, 1997, p. 10). In spite of all that is offered to them in terms of T&D, employees might not be willing to participate and persist in learning for the organization because their learning processes might have been overly directed by management and because their learning needs in this regard might not have been supported.

Purpose of the Study

The overriding purpose of this study was to explore how direction and support of front-line employees' learning for the organization was operationalized in one for-profit organization which was recognized to be a human resource development leader by both its internal labor force and external agencies. The next section identifies the main research question and two subquestions used to generate the research for this study.

Main Research Question and Subquestions

In order to explore the relationships between direction, support, and learning for the workplace, the main research question addressed was: What constitutes a learning opportunity in the workplace? Underpinning the main inquiry were the following subquestions:

1. What were the executive managers' perceptions of the circumstances which helped to create learning opportunities in regard to direction and support?

2. What were the front-line employees' perceptions of the circumstances which helped to create learning opportunities in regard to direction and support?

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions were employed in this study:

Learning opportunity: An organizationally sponsored set of circumstances for which the learner could acquire new knowledge, skills, or attitudes.

Perception: Recognition, appreciation, or understanding of a situation.

Workplace: An organization that practiced the creation and support of learning opportunities for its employees by sponsoring their participation in T&D programs.

Executive managers: The owners of the company; those who were responsible for making strategic and tactical operational and human resource management decisions and who had line authority or supervisory responsibility over front-line employees.

Front-line employees: The employees in the organization who did not have line authority over other staff members and who were directly responsible for delivering the company's primary services.

Self-direction: Authority to determine what needed to be learned for the organization and how that learning would be carried out.

Support: Activities that increase employee confidence and commitment to engage and persist in learning for the organization.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review discusses support mechanisms for learning, those that are seen to increase employees' abilities and motivation to assume more responsibility and accountability for creating and implementing choices for their learning. The first section explores those factors that increase employees' self-directedness in learning for the organization. The second section provides information regarding self-directed learning, a training and development process that relies upon employees' self-directedness.

Self-directedness

The crux of self-directedness is decision management in learning; the learner's ability (authority) to create choices and to feel an obligation (responsibility) to deal with the consequences (accountability) resulting from the activation of those choices in a "safe" environment (Argyris, 1991; Hequet, 1996; Medina, 1995; Piskurich, 1994; Rao, 1995; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). It differs from self-directed learning: Self-directedness is required to operationalize self-directed learning (Baskett, 1993; Brockett, 1994; Garrison, 1997). The following section discusses the factors which increase employees' abilities to "have a say" in their learning processes. This information is documented in two parts: organizational culture and learning leaders.

Organizational Culture

An organizational culture, which depends upon employee intervention in decision making, is more likely to allow employee self-direction in managing work and learning processes. Specifically, clan cultures foster the creation of a shared corporate vision between management and employees, which leads to stronger feelings of loyalty to the organization. Ostensibly, those who work in a clan culture are more likely to go out of their way to meet organizational goals (Starke & Sexty, 1998). Clan cultures reward employees' commitment to the organization primarily by promoting from within; consequently, employees strongly identify with the

organization and the values of its top management team. In clan cultures, "tradition is emphasized and long-time members of the firm serve as mentors and role models for newer members" (p. 577). Clan cultures are considered to be strong because they "carefully define the way they conduct business and how they will treat employees, customers, suppliers, and others" (Barny, 1986; cited in Starke & Sexty, 1998, p. 574). They create a sense of stewardship which employees internalize and subsequently operationalize to contribute to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. In clan cultures, it is more likely that learning for the organization will occur because there are high degrees of goal congruency between the organization, management, and employees.

Organizational cultures which support learning value employee self-directedness and risk taking (Marsick & Watkins, 1993; Rolls, 1995). Employees who have the authority and freedom to continuously challenge the status quo are more likely to engage in continuous learning, largely because there are fewer impediments to their decision making in this regard. Management expects to be challenged and believes that the generation of alternative points of view is required from all types of employees in the organization. There is an acceptance of potential conflict and a subsequent willingness to consult with others to overcome conflict. A culture which fosters goal congruency between the organization and its employees and which supports autonomy, decentralized decision making, and belief in action underscores an organization's propensity to accept employee intervention in determining what should be learned to effect organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Harris, 1998). Bierema (1996) supported these posits and also believed that organizational cultures which support employees' control of personal development reward continual questioning and querying of norms. Additionally, employees' "mistakes" relating to the generation of change are greatly tolerated.

Job Characteristics Theory

Hackman and Oldham's (1980) job characteristics theory applies to this study because learning in the workplace is considered to be a job or at least a job-related task. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1997) stated that managers create "good" jobs if they can design them in a way which will increase the factors of (a) skill variety, (b) task identity, (c) task significance, (d) autonomy, and (e) feedback.

Skill variety is the extent to which a wide (versus narrow) spectrum of employees' skills and talents is needed; the greater the variety of skills and talents that are required, the higher the employee satisfaction with the job. Task identity is the employee's ability to complete a task from beginning to end, which leads to higher degrees of personal satisfaction. Task significance is the degree to which the job is deemed to be important in terms of its contribution to the organization. Task significance relies on employees' abilities to conceptualize how the job, at a micro level, fits into the "greater scheme of things" at a macro level. For instance, corporate trainers would experience high levels of task significance if they perceived their instruction as an integral, not an ancillary, component of the entire company's organizational development program. Autonomy is the extent to which the employee is able to choose both what is required to do the job and how these tasks are to be carried out. Finally, feedback is the degree to which the learner recognizes that job outcomes have resulted in some change.

The significance of Hackman and Oldham's (1980; cited in Schermerhorn et al., 1997) findings is that the "learning job" can be enriched by improving upon each characteristic, provided that the individual has a high need for self-direction, learning, and personal accomplishment. In turn, intrinsic motivation is increased because meaningfulness and responsibility for the outcomes of the work are experienced, and there is knowledge that learning has resulted in a benefit to the organization.

Some researchers have argued, however, that the relationship between job satisfaction and improved performance is tenuous (Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright, Mondy, & Noe, 1997).

Employees who are highly satisfied with their work conditions in general may not increase their productivity because they are satisfied with their current levels of performance and because they see no need to change. An employee's performance is most likely to improve if he or she perceives that task design within the job meets acceptable, personal standards (Starke & Sexty, 1998).

Recognition and Rewards for Learning

Fritz (1997) stated that if organizations fail to recognize and reward top-notch work performance, good performers will become poor performers and will leave the company to seek recognition and rewards elsewhere. There is also a need to conscientiously recognize and possibly reward learning performance as a means for building on learners' intrinsic motivation to engage and persist in learning for the organization. Field and Ford (1995; cited in Marsick & Neaman, 1996) stated that when concentrated efforts are made to congratulate employees for challenging the status quo, the organization itself becomes one which is more adaptable to change. Recognition systems, such as "employee appreciation" events, provide employees with constant reinforcement so that they think about their workplace as a continuous source of learning and development (Bassi, Cheney, & Van Buren, 1997; Marsick & Watkins, 1992). Senge (1990a; 1990b) added that learning behaviors, especially the application of learning, are more likely to be reinforced by recognition (cited in Kim, 1990). Zemke and Zemke (1995) insisted that "feedback and recognition should be planned. Learners need to know what they are trying to accomplish and how they are doing" (p. 34). Concomitantly, the same authors believed that learners' motivation can be increased by appealing to their need for personal gain in terms of self-esteem and pleasure.

Generally speaking, recognition and rewards are seen to have an overall positive benefit, if applied properly. Spikes (1995) believed that organizations have a tendency to reward employees for "knowing," not for the process of learning. This fails to instill the need for continuous learning, as does punishment. Some managers do not tolerate mistakes that

employees make while they are practicing what they have learned, so they apply punishment to "make learning go faster." Wright et al. (1996) stated that "excessive criticism and discouragement damages people's self-confidence and sense of worth and reduces their level of aspiration" (p. 198). Finally, in terms of reinforcement theory in general, Starke and Sexty (1998) commented that the omission of what might be perceived as positive stimuli by learners is more likely to ensure that the behavior will not be repeated.

Learning Leaders

Adult educators are those individuals who have given their consent to be so (Callendar, 1992). He also suggested that adult educators are transformed into learning leaders when they also perceive themselves to be learners, when they make every situation a learning experience, and when they build democracy in learning transactions. Learning leaders consider students to be their "equals"; consequently, they concern themselves with the facilitation of mutual and collaborative learning interactions as a means to gain clarity, understanding, and respect for individual differences. Fundamentally, effective learning leaders believe that learners should have some authority to self-direct their learning.

Learning leaders in the workplace are managers who afford employees with some authority to control personal learning processes. Learning leaders believe that employees' learning contributions matter to the organization; they influence employees to share in this belief (Harris, 1998), thereby creating a strong sense of stewardship in employees. Ultimately, workplace learning leaders influence employees to be more responsible and accountable for creating new knowledge and for applying that knowledge to work processes. The following section outlines two main constructs that aid in the determination of whether or not a manager in the workplace is a learning leader. The first is Theory Y management; the second is the teacher-learner transaction.

Theory X and Theory Y Management

MacGregor (1960; cited in Starke & Sexty, 1998; Certo, 1997) believed that managers generally fall into one of two categories: Theory X or Theory Y. Generally, Theory X managers believe that employees are not willing to contribute to organizational goals unless they are coerced and manipulated by management to do so. Theory X managers believe that employees need to be constantly and closely supervised because employees cannot be trusted to perform well on their own. Theory X management fosters the belief that it is managers who "need" all of the authority and control they can muster so that they can contend with employees' unwillingness to be responsible for carrying out work obligations. Because of the "dividing line" between Theory X managers and employees, little or no consultation occurs between them.

In contrast, Theory Y managers create environments in which employees can fulfill their potential to be self-directed and autonomous. Theory Y managers believe that employees have the propensity to fulfill work obligations willingly and competently, which is matched with their desires and abilities to learn how to seek out additional responsibility in the right circumstances. Theory Y managers are more likely to support employees' self-direction at work through the practice of participative management and decentralized decision making (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998) because they believe employees apply high degrees of innovation, creativity, and ingenuity in problem solving. Theory Y managers are more likely to empower employees by allowing them to make decisions for the organization at both macro and micro levels. Fundamentally, Theory Y managers believe employees want to work; they do not believe employees "have" to be made to work.

Participative Management

Participative management allows employees to provide input into decision making by minimizing centralization or concentration of decision-making power at management levels of the organization (Starke & Sexty, 1998). It is the antithesis to mechanistic and Theory X principles of management because it puts control into the workers' hands (Ravid, 1987; cited in Marsick, 1987).

Wright et al. (1996) stated that organizations which practice participative management and decentralized decision-making authority have staff members who are able to make the soundest decisions because they are free to choose amongst many alternatives. The organization benefits because "employees who are involved in areas that matter to them will often respond to shared problems with innovative suggestions and unusually high productive efforts" (Wright et al., 1996, p. 236). Employees benefit in this regard because they gain control and become more connected to their work processes in terms of having a larger "stake" in what they do for the organization. Wright et al. (1996) believed that participative management can lead to employees' "increased acceptance of management's ideas, increased cooperation between management and staff, greater acceptance of changes; and improved attitudes toward the job and the organization" (p. 236). Ultimately, participative management increases employees' willingness and abilities to be more responsible and accountable for their work activities because they are allowed to "have a say" in the ways that the organization is managed.

Participative management also has its limitations. For instance, participation "is not feasible when immediate decisions are required; the manager may be forced to make a decision and issue directives" (Wright et al., 1996), such as in a situation for which government regulation applies (i.e., safety and health issues). In some organizations, participative management cannot be operationalized because employees are not practiced at it or they are afraid: "In the past, silence was rewarded, not speaking out" (Wright et al., 1996, p. 236). Participants must have the ability or experience, skills, knowledge, materials, and technology to make decisions. It is also not supported when management deems that, rightly or wrongly, employees are incompetent or too immature to contribute to planning or problem solving.

Maturity Theory

Starke and Sexty (1998) used Argyris' (1957) maturity theory to suggest that the demands of the organization and the demands of an adult worker's mature personality are often incongruent. Typically, mature employees feel that management expects them to be passive and submissive and to carry out orders without question. Because employees learn to be helpless,

they eventually lose their will to contribute to decision-making processes and lose even more control over their work. Managers who put maturity theory into practice believe that employees do not have the ability to contribute at an organizational (macro) level of decision making that requires long-term vision. Instead, employees are considered only to be capable of short-range, short-term, tactical decision making at the work task (micro) level of organizational operations. "When managers fail to recognize subordinate maturity, they create a counterproductive work environment" (Starke & Sexty, 1998, p. 442).

Teacher-Learner Transaction

In the realm of education, there is a relationship which considers the "underling" to be mature enough to handle decision-making responsibilities. Fundamentally, the teacher-learner transaction is premised upon the teacher's willingness and ability to afford the learner with some authority to make decisions about what is to be learned (Garrison, 1997). This has a direct link to employees' learning for the workplace in respect to managers' roles as learning leaders to employees. The teacher-learner transaction helps to explain how and why the transfer of control from learning leader to learner is essential in building employees' motivation to assume more responsibility and accountability for their learning.

The teacher-learner transaction is of the highest quality when the relationship is neither teacher nor learner centered, but balanced (Garrison, 1997). This is predicated upon the belief that instructors and learners view each other as equals (Callendar, 1992; Tough, 1971; cited in Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986) who share authority to control the learning process. The purpose for establishing a quality teacher-learner transaction is to increase learners' willingness to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for creating meaningful learning that is more likely to be applied (Garrison, 1997; Medina, 1995). A shift away from teacher-centeredness toward learner-centeredness is meant to give the learner a "stake" in learning.

Two-Way Communication

Theory Y management, participative management, and the teacher-learner transaction are all predicated upon two-way communication. "Two-way communication takes place when the sender directs a message to the receiver expecting an immediate, obvious response" (Starke & Sexty, 1997, p. 512), thereby facilitating learners' abilities to "have a voice" because the sender expects an immediate reply. Some managers do not use two-way communication because they are reluctant to consider another's point of view that might challenge their own stance.

In contrast, one-way communication is used when the sender does not wish to provide the receiver with an opportunity to provide a point of view on the message. One-way communication is used when large amounts of information need to be presented quickly to a large audience; it is most commonly found in classroom lecture situations in which the teacher "fills the students' heads with facts." In the workplace, it is also found in situations in which managers perceive a need for directive counseling, a means of communication in which the manager tells the employee to conform to some standard of behavior (Certo, 1997). One-way communication minimizes the prospect for negotiation between the message sender and receiver. Consequently, the receiver has virtually no opportunity to rebut the sender's point of view.

Marsick and Watkins (1996) stated that two-way communication develops "open thinking," or a set of activities to include the learner's ability to advocate a viewpoint, explain personal reasoning, and inquire into others' reasoning. It works well in situations where teachers or managers are willing to be challenged and expect to be challenged (Rolls, 1995). Two-way communication facilitates the creation of new knowledge because it increases the learner's ability to assess information and act on that information (Galagan, 1997; Garrison, 1997; Kim, 1990; Marsick & Neaman, 1996; Marsick & Watkins, 1992; Nonaka, 1991; Senge, 1990). Two-way communication helps learners to create more choices from which more informed decisions

can be made because it supports access to information, which is needed to manage the learning process. Access to information is the key to control.

Motivation

Motivational theories attempt to explain why people are willing to achieve some goals and why they are not willing to achieve others. These theories have been discussed in terms of an individual's propensity to complete tasks in a workplace setting. They have contextual application here because learning for the organization is a work-related task. According to Starke and Sexty (1998), Certo (1997), and Schermerhorn et al. (1997), there are two types of motivational theories: process and content.

Process Theories of Motivation

Process theories, such as expectancy theory, equity theory, and goal setting, are conceptual frameworks which relate to how people are motivated by goals and desired outcomes.

Expectancy theory. Expectancy theory posits that learners are intrinsically motivated to learn when they are attracted to a goal and when they believe that learning outcomes are achievable, that expended effort achieving these outcomes will result in some performance, and that performance will help learners to achieve a specific goal. Motivation consists of an interaction among (a) valence, (b) effort to performance expectancy, and (c) performance to outcome expectancy (Certo, 1997; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998).

Valence is the attraction one feels to the intended outcome. The effort to performance expectancy reflects the employee's perception that the expended effort will lead to good performance. Here, consideration is given to personal experience and competency required to do the job. A low self-rating means the person does not feel competent, whereas a high self-rating indicates the person perceives that he or she is certainly competent. The performance to outcome expectancy reflects one's belief that performance is connected to rewards. If the employee feels that the job will attract high rewards, he or she rates this component very highly.

The higher the attraction to the output and the higher the rating assigned to the effort and performance expectancy zones, the more motivated the individual is to do the job.

Equity theory. Equity theory posits that people have a tendency to compare their efforts (inputs) to those of others who are completing the same tasks. If a person feels that he or she is being treated inequitably in terms of receiving benefits which include pay, recognition, or other rewards (outcomes), he or she is likely to try to reduce the amount of inequity by (a) raising or lowering inputs or outcomes in relation to the comparison person (e.g., increase effort to attract more benefits or decrease effort to justify lower levels of benefits); (b) rationalizing that one's own inputs and outcomes are better than those of the comparison person, thereby convincing oneself that the comparison person is not better off; (c) changing the comparison person; or (d) quitting the job (Starke & Sexty, 1998).

Goal setting. Goal setting "focuses worker attention on [a] goal, encourages them to come up with innovative ways to achieve the goal, and generally increases their motivation" (Starke & Sexty, 1998, p. 452). Some research has suggested that employees are more likely to increase their productivity if they set specific goals which are challenging, yet achievable (e.g., Carnevale, 1988; cited in Palmer, 1992; Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996).

Content Theories of Motivation

Content theories of motivation focus on the identification of individuals' needs (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998). Their basic tenets state that one's desire to meet a need causes "psychological tension" which triggers the individual to begin activities to minimize that tension. Examples of content theories include, but are not limited to, Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Maslow's theory. Maslow's theory posits that people have a hierarchy of five needs sets ranging from, lowest to highest, physiological to self-actualization. Harris (1998) stated that Maslow conceded that there is a need even higher than that of self-actualization, which is self-transcendence or the need to work toward a goal which serves more than just personal interests

(p. 302). Maslow contended that one moves up the hierarchy after his or her needs in lower ranges are fulfilled in sequence.

Limitations. Content theories do not always account for the complexities in people's jobs. They neglect to consider that

> (1) each person has a different set of needs and these needs change over time; (2) needs are translated into action in different ways; (3) people may be inconsistent in translating their needs into actions; and (4) people react differently to need fulfillment or lack of need fulfillment. (Starke & Sexty, 1998, p. 443)

Content theories could help to describe worker motivation provided that one could ascertain a common set of needs which many workers need to fulfill, in some sequence. To this point, content theories have not been specifically applied to describe one's process of needs fulfillment in terms of learning for the workplace.

Self-Directed Learning

Support of self-directed learning (SDL) is the driving force behind employees' increased willingness to assume more responsibility and accountability for helping to improve and increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency because it depends upon the learner's ability to have the authority to control personal learning processes. "The ultimate challenge in organizations is to harness adult learners' propensity to be self-directed learners and not create barriers that prevent or discourage it" (Bierema, 1996, p. 25). Merriam and Caffarella (1991) concurred. They said that adults need the space and support to be self-directed in learning. The following section provides an overview of SDL by discussing relevant definitions, Garrison's (1997) SDL model, learning philosophies that support SDL, readiness for SDL, and monitoring systems.

Definitions

SDL is not a newly invented, educational "flavor of the month." It has been a significant field of research for over 30 years (Brockett, 1994). Knowles' (1975) definition of SDL is

> a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (p. 18)

SDL studies have been generated to explore the "learner's involvement in every aspect of planning every phase of the learning activity" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 25). SDL is a learning system which allows the learner to have some control—not total control—over personal learning processes, regardless of the context in which it is operationalized. It is not meant to be an "all or nothing" concept (Brockett, 1994; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985; Confessore, Confessore, & Greenberg, 1996; Garrison, 1997; Hiemstra & Brockett, 1994; Kerka, 1994) for which all external stimuli can be excluded. Even the most self-directed learners need some direction and support from external sources (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Garrison's SDL Model

Garrison (1997) believed that SDL is influenced by three interdependent components: (a) motivation, (b) self-management, and (c) self-monitoring. An adaptation of Garrison's SDL model, Figure 2.1, is included to illustrate the interconnectivity of these elements and to provide a framework for the discussion that follows.

Entering and Task Motivation

Garrison applies expectancy theory to this component of his model. Expectancy and valence (e.g., the degree to which the learner is attracted to the goal) are the two main elements which comprise the preliminary stage of "entering motivation," which is diagrammed below in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.1. An SDL model (adapted from Garrison, 1997, p. 22).

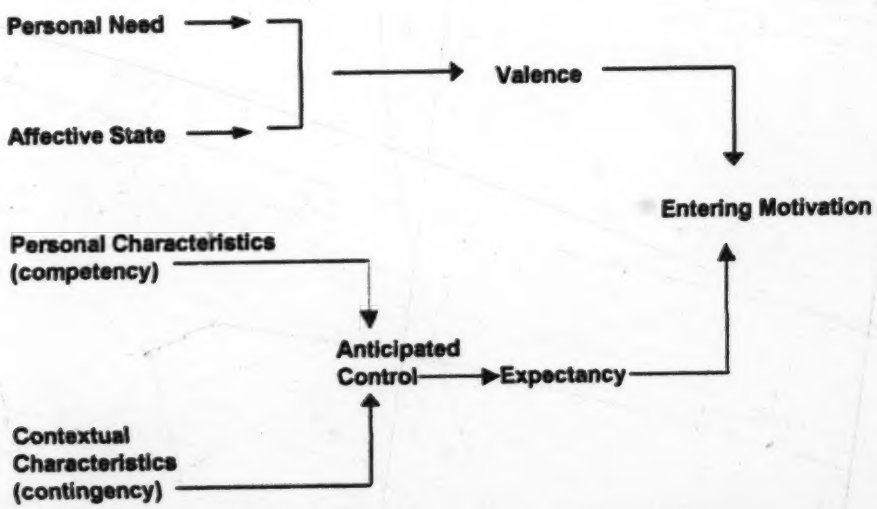

Figure 2.2. Factors influencing entering motivation (adapted from Garrison, 1997, p. 28).

Valence comprises both personal need and affective state. Personal need is related to the individual's value system. The affective state comprises attitudes about self such as goal preference, task anxiety, and self-esteem. The learner is attracted to the goal because of high levels of goal congruency between what the learner wants to learn and what the learner has to learn, coupled with his or her belief that there is psychological readiness to learn.

Garrison (1997) contended that if learners feel they have the competency and self-efficacy to attain the goal and the ability to contend with any barriers (contingency) which might impede goal attainment, they are more willing to enter into learning because of anticipated control over the learning situation. Comparatively, Starke and Sexty's (1998) interpretation of the effort to performance zone is the area in which Garrison's control determination would be completed.

The stage of entering motivation is where learners perceive whether or not they have clear choices about learning: "Providing opportunities for control and choice from the beginning can significantly strengthen the entering motivational state, which subsequently influences whether students will become self-directed and persist in their learning tasks" (Garrison, 1997, p. 28).

The second stage of motivation is task motivation, which relates to learners' persistence in learning or their volition to sustain effort in this regard. It is directly linked with learner responsibility for the achievement of desired learning outcomes or the process of creating meaningful knowledge. In order for learners to feel accountable for learning outcomes, they must also be willing to internalize external goals (which Garrison [1997] believed are more pervasive during entering motivation). Learners need to know "what's in it for them" to perceive that they will have some control over the situation. In terms of workplace learning, learners' needs also have to be satisfied in conjunction with those of the organization, which indicates that there is some connection to content theories of motivation in this model, which Garrison does not explicitly state. In terms of motivation, Garrison's final suggestion is that "students should be provided, at the very least, with an opportunity to understand why specific objectives are

worthwhile, if not to select relevant objects from among several options, shape approaches, and select appropriate learning tasks' (p. 29).

Self-Management

Self-management relates to the learner's ability to choose the types of learning resources and support mechanisms which will best aid in goal attainment. It has more to do with the learner's state of "being self-directed" in learning because it relates most to those tools the learner believes are required to complete the learning task and how those tools will be used, when, where, and for how long. This component is connected to environmental factors which serve as support mechanisms for one's learning, ranging from interpersonal systems such as mentorship, to technological systems ranging from pen and paper to modern electronics. Garrison (1997) believed that self-management relates highly to "what people *do* during the learning process" (p. 22).

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring considers the cognitive component of SDL. It is the phase in which the learner takes responsibility for constructing personal meaning or creating new knowledge by integrating new information with previously held assumptions. Self-monitoring is the component which has the most to do with "paradigm" and "mental model" shifts, or the way that learners "look at the world" (Chawla & Renesch, 1995; Senge, 1990). "To self-monitor the learning process is to ensure that new and existing knowledge structures are integrated in a meaningful manner, so that learning goals are being met" (Garrison, 1997, p. 24). It also has much to do with assessment of why learning needs to occur in the first place.

Learning Philosophies

SDL is influenced by more than one learning philosophy (Brockett, 1994). The three learning philosophies which connect to SDL are humanist, cognitivist, and social learning.

Humanist Learning Philosophy

Jones (1997) believed that employees will shoulder more responsibility and accountability only if managers are "humane" enough to give them the authority to control work-related processes. The parity principle states that employees will be willing and able to take on more responsibility only if they have an appropriate amount of authority to enact decisions related to fulfilling that obligation (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998). Those who believe in humanist learning philosophies empower learners to make their own decisions.

Humanist learning philosophies are based upon recognition that learning is a personal act designed to fulfill potential and to meet affective and cognitive needs with a view to becoming autonomous (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). The "power person's" (teacher's or manager's) role is to develop the whole person by recognizing and then meeting the learner's needs in addition to those of the sponsoring institution. The power person perceives the learner to be willing and able to manage some or all of the learning process, which allows the teacher to act as a facilitator of learning rather than a "transmitter of content." The learner's role is to change attitudes, behavior, knowledge, and skills in collaboration with the facilitator. Humanist learning philosophies are fundamentally dependent upon shared authority, control, responsibility, and accountability for the learning process between the teacher and learner or manager and employee. The practice of humanistic learning philosophy facilitates self-directed learning.

Cognitivist Learning Philosophy

Cognitivist learning theory is based upon internal, mental processes of insight, information processing, and perception (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). The purpose for learning is to change deeply entrenched values, attitudes, and beliefs by questioning the status quo and by using critical thinking (Argyris, 1991; Garrison, 1997). Adult educators who put this theory into

practice view learners as willing and able to manage some or all of the learning process but still needing direction and support to be convinced that what needs to be learned will be of benefit to the learner. Those who take on the "teaching" role are perceived by learners to be learning facilitators and content disseminators who help learners internalize external goals (Garrison, 1997). The primary goal of enacting this theory is to help people "learn how to learn," which is exactly the target at which self-directed learning is aimed (Argyris, 1991; Bierema, 1996; Garrison, 1997; Hatcher, 1997; Palmer, 1992). Garrison's (1997) SDL model takes cognitive learning philosophy one step further to include a "collaborative constructivist" perspective: "A collaborative perspective has the individual taking responsibility for constructing meaning while including the participation of others in confirming worthwhile knowledge" (p. 19). In layman's terms, Garrison's SDL model is predicated upon personal and social influences on creating knowledge.

Social Learning Philosophy

Social learning philosophy is underpinned with views that learning processes do not occur without some form of external intervention from others (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), thereby connecting it to self-directed learning (Brockett, 1994; Kerka, 1994). Salomon and Perkins (1998) believed that individual learning is "rarely truly individual; it almost always entails some social mediation, even if not apparent" (p. 2). It is linked to, but is not synonymous with, informal learning (Baskett, 1993; Stamps, 1998). Informal learning is "learning from experience that takes place outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom based activities" (Marsick & Watkins, 1992, p. 288). Informal learning includes any learning which might be planned or unplanned, and it usually involves some degree of conscious awareness that learning is happening. A self-directed learner can choose to learn from informal learning situations, or not.

Social learning is closely linked to mentoring and modeling. "Mentorship has its roots in basic principles of human survival—to learn skills, culture, and values directly from respected others" (Haney, 1997, p. 211). In its most basic form, mentoring occurs when a learner or "protégé" engages in a relatively long-term, interactive relationship with an individual who is thought to be a guide or trusted counselor in decision making for the purpose of attaining knowledge. The protégé observes the behavior that the mentor demonstrates and learns to emulate that behavior (Stamps, 1998).

In the realm of learning, mentorships had their start in apprenticeship programs, education which was also linked to the workplace. In the workplace, however, mentorship was introduced as a method for less senior employees to gain knowledge regarding career development advice from other employees who had more organizational tenure, knowledge, and experience in this regard (Werther, Davis, Schwind, & Das, 1990). Mentors were generally perceived to be mature, wise, and trustworthy counselors who guided fledgling employees about how "to move up in the organization." Its application was elevated to include ongoing, deliberately planned training and development relationships between a more experienced and older manager and a less experienced and younger manager; an "up-and-comer" novice who needed "to learn the ropes" (Starke & Sexty, 1998).

Fritz (1997) suggested that mentors should model the standard of behavior or represent the attitude that the protégé wishes to achieve. Based upon her research, Medina (1995) stated that front-line employees seek out peers who have successfully engaged in similar learning experiences to those the protégé wishes to master. Galbraith and Cohen (1995) saw today's mentors as managers who play a dual role as educators, "creating a collaborative relationship which helps to improve staff members' effectiveness and their ability to function as skilled, independent, collaborative team members" (p. 219). Consequently, mentorship is being transformed into a formalized learning process in which both the mentor and protégé are considered to be learners in a reciprocal, mutual learning relationship: "For example, within a mentorship grouping the learner could be working to develop math skills related to blueprint

reading while the mentor is developing interpersonal skills" (Coley, 1996; Haney, 1997). Some programs are labeled as *reverse mentorships*. In these situations, it is the younger employee who mentors the older worker by educating him or her about new practices and innovations. In today's information age, those who are simultaneously concerned with human resource and organizational development purposefully create mentorships.

Readiness for SDL

Paradoxically, even though most people are ready and willing to engage in SDL (Bierema, 1996; Lee, 1998; Ravid, 1987, cited in Marsick, 1987; Tough, 1978), they have not learned how to use it. Or people may use self-directed learning in their personal lives but might not apply it to other learning situations, including those in the workplace (Kerka, 1994). Not all people use SDL to the same degree, nor does an individual use it in all situations (Piskurich, 1994a, 1994b).

Individual readiness to use SDL is highly dependent upon how it is to be operationalized in specific contexts. To this end, Baskett (1993) suggested that SDL should have a common and recognizable definition in the specific setting in which it is to be used to reduce confusion about how it is to be recognized and supported in the workplace. Regardless of whether or not many or all employees are ready, willing, and able to use SDL, their efforts might be thwarted because their organization might not be ready to afford employees the control to take charge of their learning. Individuals do not engage in self-directed learning in contexts where they are used to being "spoon-fed" and "hand-held" in learning (Piskurich, 1994). This is due to the fact that they do not have to engage in self-directed learning: "If management determines everything in the organization and workers have no input whatsoever, and if no innovations are accepted, a self-directed learning approach stands no chance of success" (Ravid, 1987; cited in Marsick, 1987, p. 112).

Baskett (1993) found 10 factors that enhanced self-directed learning in the workplace. He listed them as (a) embracing a continuous improvement approach, (b) high individual

involvement, (c) taking personal responsibility, (d) compatibility between individual and organizational values, (e) leaderships which sets an example, (f) valuing differences, (g) effective communications in the organization, (h) support for risk taking, (i) team work, and (j) encouraging innovation (p. 23). Brockett and Hiemstra (1985) provided a set of recommendations for organizations, educators, and learners which need to be implemented if SDL is to have a "fighting chance." These are listed in Table 2.1; they pertain to (a) organizations, (b) educators, and (c) learners.

As Brockett and Hiemstra's (1985) list suggests, support for self-directed learning is not meant to be the responsibility of only the organization, only the educator, or only the learner. In fact, it strongly indicates that the learner must also be ready, willing, and able to further personal learning goals with the help of others and within the context for which self-directed learning is to be operationalized. The role of the educator and the organization is to provide a suitable infrastructure to further the individual's self-direction in learning, and the learner's responsibility is to use it. Self-directed learning, according to this chart, is by no means a "one-way street."

From this long list of suggestions, it is apparent that an extensive infrastructure is needed for full-scale implementation of SDL in any setting. Brockett and Hiemstra (1985) also questioned whether SDL should be fully implemented at all:

> It is important to avoid the pitfall of viewing self-directed learning as the best way to learn. With the great diversity that exists both in learning styles and in reasons for learning, it is extremely shortsighted to advance such an argument. Perhaps it is more appropriate to think of self-directed learning as an ideal mode of learning for certain individuals and for certain situations. (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985, p. 3)

Monitoring Systems

Organizations need to have infrastructures in place to determine the extent to which any operating system, including SDL, is meeting organizational goals (e.g., Bierema, 1996; Certo, 1997; Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Gayeski, 1996; Geber, 1995; Harris, 1998; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996; Zemke, 1998). The following section provides an overview of the reasons for using and not using learning assessment tools in three part

Table 2.1

Guidelines for Implementing SDL

Organizations	Educators	Learners
1. All employee types need to be provided with the time and materials to become knowledgeable of SDL practices and implications. 2. Accountability, achievements (or lack of) and the individual programs need measurements. 3. Support systems need to be provided to help learners adjust to SDL. 4. Research on changing learning trends and interests need to be conducted. 5. Environments which support SDL need to be created.	1. There is a need to research, study, and apply emerging components of SDL that have not already been investigated or investigated to the degree that is needed. 2. SDL theories and practices need to be incorporated into other educational. methodologies 3. There is a need to help organizations incorporate the right types and amounts of SDL in organizational policies and structures.	1. There is a need to recognize that each person is a worthwhile learner. 2. Strengths and weaknesses must be examined objectively and consistently. 3. Responsibility and accountability for learning and for learning outcomes must be strengthened. 4. Personal learning processes must be understood. 5. Objective assistance for learning which also is effective and efficient must be sought out. 6. There is a need to participate in "learning advocacy" groups as a means to determine the availability of learning resources and to learn how to plan and organize for learning. 7. Autonomous learning groups must be formed to take advantage of learning synergies 8. Reinforcement and encouragement must be accepted from others. 9. Assumptions of status, respect, and expertise must be transferred from teacher to learner. 10. There is a need to actively see and take responsibility for personal education. 11. Time, space, and energy for learning projects must be governed.

(Adapted from Brockett & Hiemstra, 1985)

entitled (a) overview of assessment tools, (b) overview of learning contracts, and (c) overview of formalized objectives.

Overview of Assessment Tools

Watkins and Marsick (1993) stated that organizations which "learn" use skill inventories, learning capacity audits, and systems which document learning for the purposes of sharing knowledge and rewarding learning. Duval (1996) and Kaufman, Keller, and Watkins (1995) stated that without assessment, managers and employees might not know when interventions (including recognition and rewards) are required to put learning "back on track." Employees and the organizations in which they work are more likely to make the same mistakes repeatedly if assessment systems are not in place to document past learning experiences and if they do not generate performance records.

Harris (1998) believed that any training and development program should be formalized to some degree because the informal "learn as you go" method of learning from trial and error leads to a myriad of negative results, including increased costs from hidden expenditures, which, if not controlled, might far exceed budgetary allowances. He also stated that assessment in this regard helps to continuously communicate organizational goals to employees, thereby creating avenues for goal congruency. Concomitantly, there is also a need for managers and employees to ensure that they remember which learning goals were to be attained at the outset. One of the most compelling arguments for assessment came from Thompson and Bates (1995), who said that some form of monitoring and measuring is required to ensure that what was learned was actually applied.

Cosgrove and Speed (1995) and Geber (1995) suggested that Kirkpatrick's Four Level Evaluation Model enables managers and employees to justify effort and resources expended for learning. Level 1 determines the participants' reactions to the learning program. Level 2 focuses on learners' mastery of the program's learning objectives. Level 3 assesses whether or not learning has actually been applied to the job. Finally, Level 4 assessment pinpoints increases to

the organization's bottom line, which are a direct result of employees' learning. However, implementation of all four levels is extremely labor and cost intensive, which is why most companies use only its first two stages, if they use it at all (Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Geber, 1995).

Argyris (1991) suggested that assessment is not completed due to a "fear factor" in learning: Teachers and learners are afraid that little or no learning has taken place. Senge (1997) and Brookfield (1992a, 1992b) stated that adult learning is not necessarily a joyful experience; there are many failures which might be brought to the forefront which learners might be reluctant to recognize (Weisbord, 1987).

Overview of Learning Contracts

In the literature, learning contracts were specifically related to SDL. They consist of four main components—learning objectives, learning resources and strategies, assessment of learning activities, and a time line for learning completion—which are constructed to describe what the learner is to learn and to assess whether or not that learning actually takes place (Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986). Learning contracts are intended to be created jointly between the facilitator and the learner or the manager and the employee (Knowles, 1989, Langenbach, 1988).

Zemke and Zemke (1995) stated that although self-directed learners generally find the quickest, easiest, and least expensive way to learn, some form of learning guides would increase efficiency. Parry (1990) suggested, therefore, that formal guidelines need to be used—to ensure that learners do not sacrifice effectiveness for efficiency. Zemke (1998) and Medina (1995) both found that employees wanted to be assessed so that they would know how well they were performing. Zemke argued the merits of an assessment system in conjunction with support for self-directed learning:

> Individual employees must be freed to assess their own needs. They must be given access to a variety of resources that meet those needs. And they must be helped to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness with which their needs are being met. (p. 60)

Learning contracts, in general, are not always seen to be of benefit. If learning contracts are mismanaged with a lack of follow-up or a lack of commitment from both the learner and facilitator to review their status consistently and continuously, they do not always help learners experience positive gains (Brockett, 1983a, 1983b, 1985a, 1985b; cited in Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Kasworm, 1982, 1983; cited in Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Lagenbach, 1988). In another study, Caffarella and Caffarella found that learning contracts might demotivate learners from engaging in other SDL projects. In their truest form, learning contracts are difficult to administer (Knowles, 1975, 1984; cited in Lagenbach, 1988; Langenbach, 1988). Each contract is specific to an individual learner, and because of this uniqueness, one contract cannot be generalized for use with all learners. Each contract needs to be negotiated separately and realigned consistently and continuously during the learning process, which has been found to be extremely labor intensive for both the facilitator and learner.

Paradoxically, learning contracts are sometimes seen to minimize the control that learners need to be self-directed in learning in the first place. Bierema (1996) believed that formalization of self-directed learning in this regard should not be completed because it curbs innovation and creativity in terms of creating boundaries of what should and should not be learned. She suggested that a more informal monitoring system needs to be created which continues to maintain a balance between facilitator and learning control. In terms of "keeping things on track," she also suggested that organizations which are obsessed with growth have a tendency to institute formal learning objectives to replace what were once personalized management-intervention interactions with employees.

Overview of Formalized Objectives

Mager (1984) believed that a well-constructed objective supplies answers to the who, what, where, when, and how of learning and addresses standards of learning performance. He also stated that clearly defined objectives provide a sound basis for the selection of appropriate and cost-effective learning materials, and they help students organize their efforts, a contention

Knowles (1989) also supported. A group of learning objectives which targets learning resources and strategies, assessment of learning activities, and a time line for learning completion as areas for assessment would comprise a learning contract format. In the workplace, it is more likely that objectives are used to measure job performance. Therefore, out of a large number of performance objectives, there might be only a few objectives specifically related to learning. In the workplace, learning objectives sometimes get lost in a myriad of other performance measurement activities.

Management by objectives (MBO) is a management philosophy based upon the tenets of goal-setting motivational theory (Certo, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998). Wright et al. (1996) provided a list of benefits that the MBO process (negotiation of objectives between superior and subordinate) is to create that includes, but is not limited to, (a) opportunities for employee and management development; (b) systems for effective planning; (c) roles, responsibilities, and authority clarification; and (d) increases in employee motivation and commitment. Additionally, employees have been known to pay more attention to written, versus verbal, objectives for two reasons. First, they can be easily referred to in documented form. Second, employees perceive written objectives to be of higher importance than those which are transmitted to them orally (Certo, 1997; Mager, 1984; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996). Objectives provide managers with information that is necessary to apply recognition and rewards for learning consistently because they act as reminders to "catch an employee doing something right." Finally, they are a means to ensure that both organizational and individual needs are identified and documented when they are created collaboratively between the manager and employee.

Wright et al. (1996) suggested that MBOs also have a downside. In its truest form, the MBO process is considered to be time consuming because it is faster to "get on with and complete the work or learning task" without them. Objectives can be difficult to establish, especially when they relate to the measurement of "soft" performance such as interpersonal communication. Some find MBOs unappealing because the process also requires the setting of long-term strategic goals, an activity at which many managers and employees alike are not

skilled. Finally, if senior executives do not use MBOs personally, it is highly unlikely that the rest of their staff members will follow suit.

Summary

Shifts away from scientific and mechanistic management principles toward participative and collaborative interactions between management and employees are becoming more common practices in today's workplaces. Organizations are beginning to realize that individual development is interrelated with organizational development, and they are also beginning to understand how and why employees' self-directedness in learning is contributing to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The more employees are able to make decisions about their work and learning processes, the more likely it is that they will shoulder more responsibility and accountability. This is due to the fact that they have a larger and deeper "stake" in the organization.

The organization's culture and its internal labor force are the two main drivers for increasing self-directedness. Without top management support for the balancing of control between executives and employees, a reversion to Tayloristic practices will occur (Rose, 1997). The literature has shown general consensus for using assessment to measure learning performance and outcomes, with the caveat that all tools used in this regard be administered properly and in a manner which does not minimize learner control. Before employees can be self-directed in learning, they must be trained to use SDL within the context in which it is to be operationalized. To this end, the degree to which employees are allowed to be self-directed and when needs to be supported by top management and all employees. "Participation calls for some measure of self-discipline instead of relying on others. Subordinates must learn to handle freedom; supervisors must learn to trust subordinates" (Wright et al., 1996, p. 237).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

The purpose for conducting this study was to explore how employees' self-directedness in learning for the organization was supported in one specific, privately owned, for-profit organization (hereinafter known as "The Company"), which was recognized to be a human resource development leader by both its internal labor force and external agencies. To this end, the topic of learning opportunities for employees guided the research activities for this study. The primary subject headings used to form the discussions for this chapter are (a) design, (b) sample, (c) data collection procedures, (d) data analysis, (e) trustworthiness of the study, (f) limitations, (g) delimitations, (h) ethical considerations, and (i) significance of the study.

Design

This study was designed to obtain "two sides of the story" regarding what constituted learning opportunities in the workplace using a naturalistic approach. The design enabled comparisons and contrasts among responses provided by executive managers and front-line employees. Data were collected via semi-structured, in-depth interviews to address the research question and the subquestions posed. This approach assisted in (a) exemplifying commonalties and differences in perceptions, and (b) providing vivid examples of the relevant issues. A greater understanding of learning opportunities was gained by studying the phenomena in their natural context.

Sample

There were two important facets of the sample, which are addressed below. The first relates to the organization selected for the research; the second relates to selection of the respondents who provided the interview data.

The Company

The Company was purposively selected based upon its support of learning in the workplace and upon its internal workforce's predisposition to learning and consulting or advising others in adult learning for the business world. Without jeopardizing confidentiality, it is safe to say that The Company, along with others in Alberta, was recently, in 1998, recognized for supplying learning opportunities for its front-line employees because The Company's front-line employees took the initiative to advertise its accomplishments in this regard. Further, The Company's mission and goals revolved around the supply of services to help its clientele find and implement alternative work solutions. The Company's main customers were adult learners who had been or who were going to be displaced from their current jobs or other income-generating programs, such as employment insurance. The Company's goal was to teach adults how to sustain their ability to work. The target population from which The Company was selected were those organizations which had been recognized for supporting employee learning in the workplace. Access was gained to The Company by providing a letter of introduction and an overview of the research to the organization's owner-executives (see Appendices A and B).

The Company was purposefully selected for two primary reasons. First, it was known to support employees' learning for the organization in terms of sponsoring training and development programs. Second, its internal labor force had relatively high familiarity with adult learning principles and practices because of its service goals. Consequently, this organization was seen as one able to provide highly credible data given the research questions guiding the study.

The Respondents

Selection of the respondents was based upon (a) willingness to participate, and (b) evidence that they had participated in some aspect of adult education which was supported and provided by The Company. Two owner-executives and three front-line employees were chosen to be the key informants for the interviews. The owners were selected because they formed part of the primary decision-making quorum for operational and human resource

management practices. The front-line employees were selected because they were (a) impacted by the owners' decisions, (b) directly involved in meeting The Company's service goals, and (c) knowledgeable about the concept of adult learning in their workplace, how it was operationalized, and how The Company's policies and practices affected their learning in the workplace.

Respondents were selected using a "snowball" technique (Berg, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). During the first of a two-day field placement, I was introduced to the staff members by one of the senior owners, who was advertised by other staff members to be the most tenured and, therefore, the most knowledgeable employee on The Company's learning support systems. This executive provided me with introductory information pertaining to his own and others' roles and responsibilities in The Company, and he aided my data-collection activities by supporting my legitimacy as a researcher to the internal labor force.

While I was on site, I took advantage of opportunities to discuss learning in the workplace with the respondents. It was from these introductions and preliminary discussions that the key informants were invited to take part in tape-recorded interviews. All of the candidates who were first approached agreed to participate. The field placement was used only as a means to familiarize myself with The Company and its personnel so that I could select the appropriate key informants.

Data-Collection Procedures

This section discusses the interviews, the interview schedule, and data organization.

The Interviews

Data were collected by using a semistructured, 45-minute interview for each of the five respondents. Interviewing occurred over two separate days, which took place no more than five days after my field placement. The two members of the executive group (EG) were interviewed in The Company's boardroom during the same workday. Members of the employee group (FLG)

were interviewed at a location outside The Company over a period of one day. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in preparation for data analysis.

The Interview Schedule

The interview schedule was created during the pilot-study phase of this research project for two main purposes: (a) to address the main research question and subquestions, and (b) to cross-check data by wording the question in at least two different ways. The interview schedule guided the interview process to ensure—as much as possible—that each interview was operationalized in the same way. As this study's research subquestions suggest, the interview schedules were constructed to obtain two different perspectives on the same topics relating to employees' self-directedness in the workplace. The interview schedule created the opportunity to compare responses from two points of view, one from the executive standpoint and one from the front-line's stance. Appendices C and D show the questions which guided the interviews.

Data Organization

From the 12 questions posed to the respondents, three main topic areas pertaining to employees' learning arose. They were (a) learning objectives, (b) recognition and rewards, and (c) general support mechanisms. Data collection surrounding these categories was facilitated by querying respondents about these topics through direct and indirect questioning. Data relating to other emergent subcategories were discovered mainly through the use of ancillary questioning.

Data Analysis

Data exploration was based upon deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive analysis stemmed from information retrieved from the literature and my own related experiences related to employees' self-direction for learning for the workplace.

All of the data which pertained to each of the three main topic areas were grouped using thematic analysis (Berg, 1998). After the primary coding was completed, each of the three main topics was systematically broken down through open coding (Berg, 1998) as a means to find similarities and differences among the responses. Each of the key informants responded to the

same main topics but not necessarily to the subtopics because, with few exceptions, the latter were most often the result of unstructured probe questions.

Researcher Beliefs

Based upon my experience as a student in the field of adult education and as a practitioner of human resource development techniques for another company which supported T&D programs, I had formed three main suppositions prior to conducting the study. First, I believed that a company which had been recognized for supporting and sponsoring learning opportunities also supported employees' self-direction. Second, I consequently believed that The Company practiced participative management philosophies and used systems which monitored and recorded management and employee intervention in regard to maintaining a balance of authority and control between executives and front-line personnel as a means to support self-directedness. Finally, I supposed that a company which could be characterized in this way would recognize and reward employees specifically for their self-directedness in learning for the organization. In as much as I attempted to circumvent the effects of my beliefs on the research, it is likely that this threat was not entirely eliminated. However, the following section describes my role in attempting to mitigate this and other threats to the trustworthiness of the study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Guba (1981) provided key assumptions relevant to truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality, which were considered in the design and implementation of this study. These are discussed in terms of (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) confirmability, and (d) transferability.

Credibility

The study was designed to increase the credibility of the research by (a) condensing the time line between the selection of the respondents and their perusal of their transcripts to minimize information sharing, (b) interviewing the front-line employees outside The Company to minimize internal workplace influence, and (c) using semistructured interviews to approach data collection from different perspectives. The semistandardization of the interview schedule meant

that the respondents were treated in virtually the same way, although each interview had a life of its own. The truth value was enhanced by maintaining respondents' individualities.

Dependability

The selection of the key informants helped to increase the dependability of the study because data were retrieved from staff members in The Company who were qualified to speak to learning opportunities in the workplace. Unless these individuals experienced major paradigm shifts or unless they exited The Company en masse, similar findings would be obtained (consistency) if the study was repeated in the same setting.

Confirmability

To ensure that the findings of the inquiries reflected the respondents' understandings and not just my predilections, the following techniques were employed. First, triangulation was used to gain different insights into the phenomenon using different sources (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) although only one data collection method was used. "The key to triangulation is to vary in some way the approach used to generate the finding that you are seeking to corroborate" (p. 575). The purpose for triangulation was to ensure that "two sides of the story" were provided as a means to minimize researcher bias in interpreting data from only one source.

Each respondent was provided with the opportunity to peruse his or her own interview transcript for two main reasons. First, it afforded them the control to delete any responses which might have been perceived to be inappropriate, after the fact. Second, it allowed them to correct any inaccuracies which might have surfaced during the transcribing process. One respondent added two separate sentences to clarify one point, and another corrected four spelling errors. None of the other respondents made any changes to their transcripts.

An audit trail (Gall et al., 1996) was developed and checked by a "research-wise" individual who was not involved in the research reported here, but who was aware of my beliefs and biases. This individual monitored data-collection and analysis processes by completing the following activities: (a) reviewing the formation of the interview schedule, (b) reviewing the

content of my field notes, (c) becoming familiarized with pertinent literature, and (d) perusing the findings to check for verisimilitude in reporting.

Transferability

Providing a thick description of The Company and the respondents enhanced transferability of the findings from this study. Further, The Company can be considered to be typical of many small, privately owned, for-profit organizations. The main difference between The Company and other similar organizations is that it was recognized for providing learning opportunities in the workplace, whereas others might not have been. Therefore, the transferability of the findings might pertain more to settings—as described in the next chapter—in which adult learning in the workplace is operationalized in theory and in practice.

Limitations

This research was limited to the study of the circumstances which surrounded the creation of learning opportunities for employees in terms of the support they received for being self-directed in their learning. The intent was to gain understanding of those circumstances, which facilitated employees' learning for the organization in this regard, based upon rich descriptions provided by the selected key informants. The richness of these descriptions may have been limited by the respondents' abilities to recollect pertinent information.

Delimitations

Only The Company's Edmonton office was chosen for study, largely because of convenience. Only two days were used for the field placement and interviewing because The Company did not wish to expend additional resources for the study. Work and personal time were used by the respondents to participate in field placement, interview sessions, and transcript checking. As I had suspected at the start of the research, demands of the workplace and other interventions would prevent respondents from providing additional time to the study.

Ethical Considerations

Of prime importance to ethical considerations was individual key informant and response confidentiality. Responses were grouped together to prevent the key informants from discerning what others had said. Further, other readers of the study, including The Company's remaining staff members, will not be able to determine "who said what." Respondents were also repeatedly reminded that they could opt out of the study or veto the use of any data they provided. Neither of these rights was exercised by any of the key informants.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in two ways. First, it contributes adult learning theory. Second, it offers practical insights for enhancing learning in organizations. The literature suggested that alternatives to traditional training and development philosophies and practices were required to increase employees' learning for the workplace by affording them the authority to control their learning processes. This study contributes to the literature by helping to define self-directedness in learning within the context of the workplace. It also adds to academic knowledge pertaining to self-directed learning and will help to expand the narrow stream contentions about how this learning system is operationalized in the workplace. Additionally, the study offers insights into how organizations can realize improvements and increases in organizational effectiveness and efficiency by supporting employees' self-directedness in learning for the organization.

Summary

This chapter described the components of the qualitative research method used in this study. Topics included for discussion were the design, the sample, data collection, and data analysis. Potential interventions to trustworthiness were identified, and the reader was offered information regarding the integrity of the study. The findings of the study as they emerged from the key informants' responses are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Overview of the Findings

This chapter is separated into three major sections. The first provides a description of the organization in which the research was conducted. The second and third sections explore the Executive Group (EG) and the Front-Line Group (FLG) members' opinions regarding support of employees' self-directedness in learning for the workplace.

Description of "The Company"

The research was conducted in a 10-year-old, privately owned, for-profit organization in Edmonton, Alberta. Although the mother company had offices in other parts of Canada, it was only the organization of the Edmonton office—hereinafter known as "The Company"—which formed the basis for this study. The Company's mission and goals are discussed first. Then its internal labor force is described with the use of a schematic drawing of its organizational chart. Portrayals of both the EG and FLG are also provided as a means to familiarize the reader with respondents' general characteristics. Finally, a general overview of The Company's finances and T&D budget allocation is provided.

Mission and Goals

The Company's "reason for being" dealt mainly with convincing its adult (over 18 years of age) clients that work was the means to achieve self-fulfillment and that they had the ability and motivation to learn how to sustain work in Alberta's turbulent economic climate. The Company's mission was to teach these adult students how to uncover and utilize their potential to work continuously even if they had experienced or were going to experience a job loss. For example, one program was targeted at helping students eliminate their dependence on employment insurance by teaching them how to establish and operate their own businesses. The Company maintained its existence by continually meeting its organizational goal to make a profit

by supplying the service of helping already or soon-to-be displaced workers learn how to identify, create, and take advantage of paid work opportunities.

Internal Labor Force

The purposes of the following discussion are to help the reader become familiar with The Company, identify the areas in The Company from which the key informants were selected, and describe the composite characteristics of the EG and FLG. The task of reporting on The Company's structure was made difficult because The Company did not have formally defined, operationalized reporting paths and job specifications and job descriptions in place. Figure 4.1, the organizational chart, is an interpretation of the general reporting structure and the existing types of positions which were described to me by the respondents. Its inclusion is intended to help the reader comprehend The Company's general composition. Fewer than 20 staff members worked out of The Company, and of these, three were owners and executive managers of The Company. The remaining internal labor force consisted of junior managers and front-line employees.

Level 1

Level 1 comprised three executive managers who directly performed managerial functions of planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. As a management team, executives' main roles and responsibilities were to create strategic and tactical plans to effect company survival and growth. They were responsible for procuring and allocating company resources effectively and efficiently and for hiring the "right" employees for the "right" jobs at the "right" times. Finally, executives had overall authority to monitor work-related performance and to create and implement improvements to work processes. Executives had line authority—the right to order employees to complete work tasks—over all other staff members in The Company. The concept of adult learning in this context is important because work process improvements were generally realized by activating employees' learning for the workplace. Overall, executives were responsible for improving and increasing organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

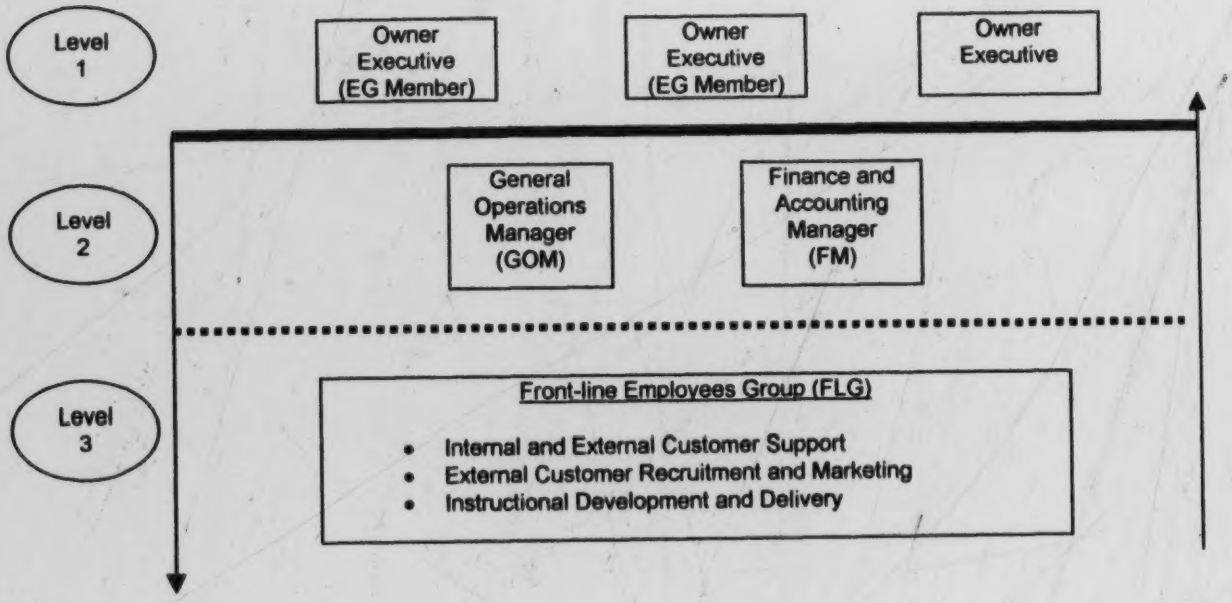

Figure 4.1. **An interpretation of The Company's organizational chart.**

All of the executives were knowledgeable of adult learning for work because of their current roles and responsibilities and because of their past experiences in other jobs—all had been instructors of adult education programs at some point in their careers. Executives were responsible and accountable for planning the recruitment and selection of employees who were willing to learn to effect organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Executives had the final say in determining the types and amounts of direction and support that The Company provided for employees' learning for the workplace.

Composite Description of the EG

A composite description of the EG is provided to protect the confidentiality of the individual respondents in this group. The EG comprised two of the three executives working at Level 1 of The Company who had the most seniority and tenure with this organization. As a unit, it had been affiliated with The Company for approximately six years. Its educational background was documented with a combination of postsecondary certification and graduate work in the fields of social sciences, business development, and labor relations. It also had more than five years of work experience in teaching adult learners. The two members of the EG were queried for their opinions because of their educational and work experience pertaining to employees' learning for the workplace. They were also queried because they were an integral part of the management team which ultimately determined how direction and support for employee learning was operationalized in The Company.

Level 2

The newly constructed Level 2 (in place for less than six months) consisted of two intermediary or middle managers, the General Office Manager (GOM) and the Financial Manager (FM). The GOM was responsible for co-managing The Company's operations with the executives, and the FM was responsible for general accounting functions and capital investment management. At the time that the research was conducted, the GOM and FM had only staff

authority or "the right to advise or assist those with line authority" (Certo, 1997, p. G-4). They did not have the right to order employees to complete work tasks as the executives did.

There were two reasons why the GOM and the FM were positioned at Level 2. First, all of the FLG members stated that they sometimes had to approach the GOM or the FM with comments and suggestions before communicating with executive managers, which, to some degree, supports a chain of command. However, neither the executives nor the front-line employees recognized any person in Level 2 as having line authority pertaining to direction and support of employees' learning-related activities.

Second, Level 3 employees could receive promotions by acquiring either the GOM or FM positions and by moving from Level 3 to Level 2. At the time the research was conducted, the GOM had recently been promoted from a Level 3 instructor position. At this same time, the FM had just been hired from outside The Company to fill a newly established and vacant position because there were no Level 3 candidates who were qualified to do the job. I was told that should a Level 3 employee attain the necessary educational and work qualifications for the FM position, he or she might be able to attain a promotion to Level 2. Although the GOM and FM were not considered to be direct supervisors of any Level 3 employees, both held positions to which front-line employees might be promoted.

Level 3

Level 3 comprised front-line employees who interacted directly with The Company's clients. These employees performed primary functions pertaining to (a) internal and external customer support, (b) service marketing and customer recruitment, and (c) instructional development and delivery.

Each employee in Level 3 also had a secondary role to consult and advise executives. Some employees at Level 3 were highly qualified to help executives manage and develop The Company's operations because of their educational backgrounds in commerce and financial planning, coupled with their work experience relating to the management and development of

their privately owned consulting businesses. Because of these qualifications, Level 3 employees were expected by the executives to provide suggestions for work process and educational program improvements. The primary role of Level 3 employees was to provide educational services to students, and the secondary role, to advise executives. No one positioned in Level 3 had line authority over any other staff member of The Company.

Composite Description of the FLG

A composite description of the FLG is provided to protect the confidentiality of the individual respondents in this group. The FLG members were qualified to speak to the topic of employees' learning in the workplace because of their job responsibilities and their experience in learning for The Company, and because they were attuned to the factors which helped The Company attain an award for supporting employees' learning. The FLG comprised three employees from Level 3 on the organizational chart who were responsible for directly attending to adult students' learning needs. All of the FLG members were experienced in supplying some educational service component to The Company's clients because they were adult educators.

The FLG's collective educational background was documented with a combination of postsecondary certification and graduate work in the fields of economics, business management and development, and health and wellness. These employees used their educational backgrounds to facilitate the development and delivery of adult education programs from The Company to its clients. Education also helped these employees determine what direction and support was needed for their own workplace learning.

As a unit, the FLG members had worked for The Company for an average of 18 months, which some might consider to be a short time. However, all FLG members were highly familiar with The Company's operationalization of direction and support for employees' learning because they had recently experienced (within less than three months) executives' interventions in their learning for the workplace. Additionally, the FLG members were familiar with the factors which they perceived had helped The Company attain provincial recognition for supporting employees' learning for the workplace.

General Financial Information and the Training and Development Budget

The company allowed the following general information pertaining to revenue and expenses and T&D budgets to be included for discussion.

Revenue and Expenses

Direct delivery costs for all of the services that The Company offered were at 50% of revenue generation. The Company covered indirect service costs with the remainder of the revenue, which included, but were not limited to, T&D. Those monies which were not spent on direct and indirect service delivery accumulated to form company profit.

The Company supported learning in the workplace by providing all staff members with extraordinary and ordinary resources. The Company directly allocated a total of $3,000 to $4,000 annually to cover all extraordinary resource costs relating to T&D for all employees at Levels 1, 2, and 3 of the organization. Extraordinary learning resources were considered to be those which The Company did not have the ability to provide itself. In the main, T&D funds were spent on sending staff members to take courses at various educational institutions outside The Company and on purchasing learning materials The Company did not have on hand.

To put The Company's direct T&D allocation into perspective, the following extrapolation is offered. If The Company had generated $1 million in revenue in one year, its annual training and development budget would have been, at most, 0.4% of its total revenue or 0.8% of its gross revenue after taking into account direct delivery costs. Because the training budget was fixed at up to $4,000 annually, increases in revenue would serve to decrease the proportion of the budget which was allocated to training. Very little of this company's revenue was directly allocated to provide employees with the ability to obtain extraordinary learning resources. Additionally, investments in learning were not proportional to increases in revenue.

Most of the T&D that employees received was categorized under ordinary resources or those tangible and intangible items that The Company had on hand to support employees' learning. Tangible materials included, but were not limited to, those items which were used to supply customer education such as the programs themselves, textbooks, journal articles,

software packages, and computers, as well as the time away from work activities to use them. More intangible ordinary resources were the executive managers' ability and willingness to help employees learn through coaching, mentoring, and modeling of learning behaviors.

The Key Informants' Responses

The remaining portion of this chapter is devoted to the exploration of the EG and FLG members' perceptions regarding direction and support of employees' learning for the workplace. Information pertaining to direction was solicited by querying each group member about learning objectives and asking about what front-line employees had to learn and when.

Each group member also supplied data regarding support for employees' learning. Specifically, all were asked to respond to questions regarding recognition and rewards. They provided their opinions regarding those factors which they perceived had either enabled or disabled their learning. Both executives' responses were pooled together to describe the EG members' opinions, and all of the front-line employees' responses were gathered to portray the FLG members' perspectives. The EG members' perceptions regarding the aforementioned topics will be discussed before the FLG members'.

The EG Members' Opinions Regarding Direction of Employees' Learning

In this section, the EG members' opinions of what predisposed employees to learn for The Company and the rationale are explored by discussing (a) employees' characteristics, and (b) mandatory learning. These topics together provide a rich description of what employees had to learn for The Company and why.

Employees' Characteristics

Management was ultimately responsible for the recruitment and selection of employees. One of the EG members stated that only those candidates who showed a propensity for learning were hired by The Company in the first place. Essentially, this executive purposefully looked for employees who were self-motivated to learn and who might not need much direction in terms of

being convinced that learning for the workplace was a requisite for sustaining work in The Company:

> They are motivated by their own sense of professionalism. We have a whole bunch of people here who really take a lot of pride in doing what they do well. They are always keen because it is the ethos of those people that we hire.

Valuable employees were those who were willing and able to learn for the organization even on their first day of work with The Company. There was a match between The Company and those people for whom continuous improvement was paramount and for whom learning was the vehicle for improving performance. Theoretically, all employees hired in The Company were supposed to be active learners who did not require high levels of direction from executives in this regard.

Mandatory Learning

Executives generally played a large role in determining what employees needed to learn at both strategic and tactical levels of decision making. All employees were required to participate in mandatory learning activities which helped the organization become more effective and efficient at a macro or corporate level and at a micro or job level.

Formal Learning Objectives

Both executives expected that all employees would participate in learning for the organization without using formal learning objectives to pinpoint what had to be learned, when, and how. The primary reason that formal learning objectives were not used for direct learning was to enable employees to learn more than only what was in the objective:

> There isn't a script written down. Having too tight control, having too tight a job description, or having too tight an expectation minimizes learning.

The other executive added to this by stating:

> When people feel that they are being controlled, they have less tendency to want to learn something or to do something new because they have less enthusiasm. When I see that, I think that too much structure decreases positive personal energy to be creative. Being creative means being able to have control over the choices which are created. Having control means having the opportunity to create choices and alternatives.

The EG members believed that formal learning objectives curbed employees' control over their learning, which in turn decreased the ability and desire to be creative and to take risks.

Executives did not want employees to wait to be told what to learn. Instead, it was hoped that the omission of formal learning objectives would allow employees to determine what their learning needs were. The executives were of the opinion that a substantial part of an employee's learning was reliant on self-direction. However, the EG members also provided evidence to the contrary in terms of describing employees' roles in making strategic and tactical decisions, which are described below.

Strategic Decisions

Employees' abilities to direct what they needed to learn were curbed by the executives' retention of authority to make strategic decisions that affected the entire organization. These types of decisions were considered to activate learning at a macro level. At the time that the research was conducted, management had decided that all of The Company's staff members would learn to work in a values-based and principled environment to facilitate corporate cultural change:

> Right now the whole company is on a learning curve. We are building our business based upon values. There is a tremendous amount of learning about that for everyone because it is a new venture.

Management assumed authority to decide The Company's strategic direction and how all employees would help meet the organizational goals of improving and increasing effectiveness and efficiency. Centralized decision making and extremely high levels of direction were used when corporate vision was at stake. At this juncture, the employees were told what they had to learn for the organization's sake without the use of formalized learning objectives. In terms of their consultative roles, employees were not asked to advise management on corporate strategy which included issues surrounding T&D at a macro level of planning.

Tactical Decisions

It was more likely that executives would consider employees' advice at tactical or lower levels of decision making where employees were encouraged to help management decide how the strategy would be turned into actual work processes. Employees were more likely to have the

authority to make decisions about what was required to learn for the workplace when it was time to operationalize the new strategy or to put the change into motion:

> They will learn because there is buy-in. They have generated the values. We have also gone through the systems so that everyone is doing things in the same way.

Along with management and other staff members, employees were encouraged to co-create learning systems to support the strategic change. By establishing a somewhat participative environment, executives received the benefit of employees' knowledge and experience with regard to creating and standardizing processes which could lead to effective and efficient use of company resources.

Another purpose for affording employees this control was to motivate them to accept the strategy in the first place. At tactical stages, employees were encouraged to help executives determine in what types of mandatory learning all staff members were going to be engaged. By assimilating employees' suggestions into the "master plan," executives increased employees' willingness to co-direct what had to be learned for the organization. Executives and employees exchanged information that was needed to direct learning during tactical or mid level but not strategic or high-level planning stages of decision making.

One way that management regulated what employees would learn was by controlling the amounts and types of information that could be accessed by employees. That which management felt was not in the best interests of employees to know was withheld:

> There are some things at the management level that don't get shared with the staff—those are usually future directions—until they are more solid. We don't want to get people's expectations raised that we are going to charge off and open a pizza training school or something and then find out that we just haven't been able to get A and B together on it. There would be some opportunities there for people to forward plan for their own learning opportunities, but they don't know that information.

In essence, employees could react only to strategic decisions which were already made by executives because they did not always have access to information that was used to create the strategies. Employees could not direct learning when they were denied access to pertinent information.

Micro Development

Management also played a significant role in determining what employees had to learn for micro development or their ability to perform well in current jobs. Both members of the EG echoed the same general opinion that employees were always given feedback or information about their performance:

> I think that it as a lot to do with the customers. When the customers' needs are not being met, it shows up very quickly. That would likely be the first indication. I can walk into the classroom and within 15 minutes or half an hour know if those clients' needs are being met. I know from experience and from being able to see what the body language and what the enthusiasm level is for both the instructor and the customer.

In this particular respondent's view, it was management's responsibility to identify employees' performance gaps. When these gaps were communicated to the employee, management was actually determining what the employee had to learn for the purpose of improving performance. In regard to management functions of leading and controlling, executives exerted their authority to monitor and correct employees' performance.

The following passage is supportive of executives' use of two-way communication to direct employees about what they needed to learn to improve performance:

> One of our people had a real skill shortage in one area. So we talked about it in a supervisory mode, and it was acknowledged that it was also something that the individual wanted to work on. I gave some direct feedback, and the next day there was a positive change. But I knew that would happen because I had seen that kind of behavior before.

Another management function was to convince the employee that a performance gap existed. The employee accepted the manager's request because there was a means to provide feedback and to achieve goal congruency. At a job or micro level, where, ostensibly, an employee would have the most authority to control what was learned, management used two-way communication to motivate the employee to internalize external goals.

The other executive also stated that two-way communication between an executive and employee was used to discuss appropriate T&D activities, as was indicated in the following passage:

> To me, that is what a learning opportunity is. It is the opportunity to see the areas for growth. That usually comes from the experience of having a person who is willing to sit down and talk. It is the experience of being able to talk with someone who can tell you what you are doing right and what needs to be improved. That kind of relationship helps people to keep learning.

According to this respondent, many learning opportunities were generated when the employee was willing to accept direction from management but also was able to co-determine what had to be learned for the organization and why. At micro levels of learning, management had a strong role in determining what the employee had to learn. The employee was obligated to accept that information and put into use, primarily to bridge performance gaps. In terms of tactical intervention, management employed two-way communication. At a strategic level, it was more likely that one-way communication was used.

The EG Members' Opinions Regarding Support of Employees' Learning

Generally speaking, both members of the EG believed that all employees were supported generously for learning. The Company provided support by creating a "learning atmosphere."

A Learning Atmosphere

The executives believed that the creation and the maintenance of a "learning atmosphere" facilitated employees' learning for the workplace. This environment was characterized as one in which ordinary resources or those items which The Company had on hand were provided to support employees' learning. The ordinary resources that the EG members described were (a) co-management, (b) employee empowerment, (c) executives' modeling of learning behavior, and (d) recognition for learning.

Co-Management

The EG members perceived that participative management was operationalized through the creation and maintenance of cooperative and collaborative transactions between management and front-line employees at tactical levels of decision making. One of the EG members stated that participative management in learning was characterized as learning together:

> Everyone is trying to work on areas that they are not expert at, and we are trying to learn it together. We try to give everyone a lot of support, and we can't motivate them by smacking them around.

It was thought that employees were supported in learning when they were treated as learning partners. This also implied that employees had some authority to control some aspects of their learning, as long as they did not make unilateral decisions in a vacuum.

Employee Empowerment

In The Company, employee empowerment had much to do with management's willingness to share decision-making responsibility and accountability with employees. One executive stated:

> I think that the biggest thing is that it is the responsibility and the ownership. I find that you don't get that if people think that they are just employees. If you are just an employee, then the success or failure is not a personal problem; it is then considered to be the supervisor's problem. If I empower the facilitators, then the success or failure becomes a team effort, and the whole group feels more responsible. If people feel responsible, they also feel that they want to learn more.

This respondent believed that employees would be motivated to learn when they felt that they were expected to be responsible and accountable for meeting or not meeting their work and learning obligations, just as management was. Management attempted to build an atmosphere in which learning was worthwhile, purposeful, and meaningful by increasing the employee's "stake" in the organization, which, in turn, was to increase the employee's desire to learn more for The Company. Treating employees as equals was meant to increase employees' intrinsic motivation to learn.

Another aspect of empowerment related to management's desire and ability to create an environment that supported learning from trial and error. If employees applied learning outcomes incorrectly, they did not experience severe negative consequences for their mistakes. By removing unpleasant stimuli, management practiced negative reinforcement of learning behavior. Employees continued to want to learn because they were not punished for making mistakes.

> First of all, we have to accept that people will make mistakes, and we have to encourage people to make mistakes. The lack of willingness to accept mistakes means that people will be less and less willing to try new things. If people do not feel that they can make

> mistakes, eventually their response will be to not do anything at all. Secondly, people have to learn from those mistakes.

Learning from trial and error meant allowing employees to experience the negative consequences of their decision making without fear of reprisal. Employees were supported when mistakes were made because management did not want employees to shy away from taking on more responsibility and accountability. The only caveat to support for trial and error learning was the expectation that employees would not make the same mistakes repeatedly.

Modeling of Learning Behavior

Executives also actively supported employees' learning by modeling learning behaviors themselves:

> Other ways of doing it is that the partners, themselves, are going on training. What we are indicating to our staff by doing this is that we not only preach about lifelong learning, but we also practice it ourselves. We are going to learn about certain things in that training session that we can bring back and share. I think that we are identifying that all of us need to learn—that it doesn't stop.

This executive's statement relayed the perception that employees would feel more supported in their own learning not only when they observed that management engaged in learning, but also when they benefited from that learning.

Recognition and Rewards for Learning

Generally, management recognized employees' learning by supplying verbal commentaries. Learning was rewarded by redesigning jobs, by promoting employees to jobs with higher levels of responsibility, and by distributing extraordinary resources to employees.

Verbal Recognition

Management positively reinforced appropriate learning behaviors by presenting what were thought to be pleasant stimuli in the form of verbal recognition. This executive recognized "good" learning behavior by congratulating employees privately and publicly:

> When that behavior changed, what I do to reinforce that new learning is to make sure that he or she knows that I have noticed and to tell a few other people.

This respondent felt responsible for actually supplying the recognition and for creating an avenue for other staff members also to identify where a colleague might have excelled as a

result of learning. Verbal recognition was not backed up with monetary rewards, however. Generally speaking, recognition of learning was conducted with "pats on the back":

> It's not recognized with dollars; it is recognized more with kudos and a "Well Done!" One of my mandates that I have chosen to use at that meeting is to congratulate the people who have been doing something special, and especially when it has been something difficult.

This executive made a conscientious effort to recognize those who had embarked upon and successfully completed some learning mission. When employees chose the right course of action, their behaviors were reinforced with recognition. However, all employees might not receive the same support because recognition was also dependent upon the uniqueness and complexity of the learning endeavor, including the degree to which learning outcomes benefited The Company. Some employees might not receive recognition if their learning successes were considered by management to be more "ordinary."

Job Redesign

Executives also recognized employees' desire and abilities to learn by redesigning jobs to incorporate higher degrees of functional variety. By redesigning jobs, management helped to create more learning opportunities because the employee had to learn how to complete different tasks in different settings. Job enlargement, which primarily involved the addition of more tasks to a job without increasing levels of responsibility, was the main type of job redesign employed:

The employees get to go into other programs to show people how to do something.

This executive's statement indicated that instructors, specifically, were able to migrate from their regular courses into different courses. For this case, an instructor's core job was purposefully enlarged to incorporate deviations from routine tasks or to reduce employee boredom. In this regard, job enlargement could be considered an extrinsic reward for learning.

Job-enlargement techniques also indicated that management actually triggered employee learning by creating work tasks that the employee might not have adequate knowledge and experience to complete. By relying on employees' desire to do their jobs well or their needs to reduce uncertainty, job enlargement actually reinforced continuous learning for The Company.

Promotions

Promotions were also used to recognize employees' learning, although the frequency of these events was limited due to the "flatness" of the organization. Employees had to demonstrate that they were capable of learning and that they had successfully applied what was learned in current jobs before they would be considered for promotion. In one of the executive's opinions, learning created work opportunities, which, in turn, led to the creation of more learning opportunities. This cycle was described in the following passage:

> Learning is recognized with increases in responsibility and with more opportunities. That option is here for people. They have the opportunity to move up and grow. We promoted five people up over the years from various locations—sometimes permanently, sometimes part-time—into management positions. The learning opportunities are here.

It was more likely that management would fill job openings with existing employees because these individuals had already proven themselves to be competent at learning:

> We always, always look to see if we have someone who can do it from inside because we know that they know us and there isn't a steep learning curve to contend with.

For this executive especially, the ultimate reward for learning was thought to be a promotion in The Company. Essentially, if employees treated The Company well by learning for the organization, they were, in turn, treated well by The Company.

One of the executives stated that the final stage of learning was the employee's ability to demonstrate an application of what was learned to various work situations:

> There are three levels of learning. The first deals with getting information or picking up things that you didn't know before. If one can integrate that with the rest of what is already known, then knowledge is created. That's the second level of learning. The third level of learning is when one can take that knowledge, synthesize it, and apply it to a new situation. If you can't perform it, then you have not learned it.

This executive did not consider employees to be adept at learning until they completed each of the three learning stages in a linear and hierarchical manner. When management observed that employees completed these tasks, they were more likely to be considered for promotion.

Employees who were perceived to have a helping attitude were more likely to obtain promotions than those who did not:

> People could have the same skill set and the same abilities, but it is their attitude that is most important—not necessarily that they want to change the world, but that they want to

> made things a little better. I look for people who are prepared to give it all to me and do what it takes. It is learning more stuff, finding more resources, or caring more, or putting in more hours, or being more compassionate.

Executives were more likely to recognize learning with promotions when employees had proven themselves to be willing and able to help the organization in ways that were "over and above" those normally expected. Proven employees were also more likely to be able to experience more learning opportunities because they were more likely to be considered for promotions.

Extraordinary Resources

Learning was also rewarded in terms of supplying employees with access to extraordinary resources, those items that The Company did not normally have on hand. These included, but were not limited to, courses and workshops which were taught by other educational institutions. Because the executives believed that each employee was valuable to the organization, they also believed that employees' learning needs should be respected and met by The Company:

> From my perspective, it is always the same. We do what we can to help people be happier, to be more productive, and to do their jobs better so that they are satisfied with the organization. We set up a workspace that has respect for people and has the capacity to recognize individual skills and individual needs within the framework of the task that has to be achieved. There has to be a match between the needs of the company and the person's abilities and desires.

This executive believed that management could help employees feel more valuable by meeting individual needs. For this to occur, there was a proviso that individual needs match organizational needs; otherwise The Company might not benefit from the employee's utilization of extraordinary resources. What the individual wanted to learn had to be congruent with what the organization needed the employee to learn.

Goal congruency. Employees whose goals were congruent with those of The Company were more likely to receive extraordinary resources as rewards for learning. The converse was also true: Employees whose learning goals were not congruent with those of The Company in terms of its mission, goals, or values for either the short or long term were generally not provided with extraordinary resource support:

> If there is no match between where we're at and where we're going and what that person wants, then it's, "I'm sorry. We can't do that."

Organizational needs superseded employees' needs with regard to extraordinary resource allocations. This did not necessarily mean that employees' personal learning needs could not also be met in conjunction with learning for the organization. It did mean, however, that the organization's needs were to be met first and the employees' second, as was illustrated in this executive's statement:

> We support our people. For example, we pay people's tuition to take university classes. If they pass the class, we pay half their tuition. We do this as long as we see that it will relate to their job or to a future role in The Company. If they want to go and take *Sanskrit*, I don't think that I could support that. Take it as a part of your course when you are taking one that benefits us.

The Company held the purse strings; therefore, it was entitled to limit expenditures and distribute revenue as it saw fit.

Highly valuable employees. Each and every employee was considered to be valuable to the organization. However, there were degrees of "valuableness" which influenced the distribution of extraordinary rewards, because some employees were perceived by executives to be more valuable. Employees who fell into the latter category were more likely to attain extraordinary resource support:

> Probably the other blockage would be if we weren't convinced that the person was going to be a valued employee—someone that was fairly new, or if he or she had a limited skill set. We won't invest in a person for what he or she wants to do if it has nothing to do with the places that we are going, or someone who has been with us for a while and we're thinking that we're not going to keep him or her because he or she doesn't have, as a package, all of the things that we need. That would be based on individual talent.

Employees were considered to be highly valuable to The Company when they were perceived to have the capacity to contribute to the organization immediately and in the future. For example, employees who were successful at working in redesigned jobs were more likely to provide long-term benefit to The Company because they would have gained more corporate experience leading to promotion. "Proven" employees were seen to warrant further development because they were assumed by management to be more likely to contribute more to The Company for a longer period of time.

The FLG Members' Opinions Regarding Direction of Employees' Learning

In this section, the FLG members' opinions of what predisposed employees to learn for the organization and the rationale are explored by discussing (a) employees' characteristics, and (b) direction. These topics together provide a rich description of what front-line employees were directed by executives to learn for the organization and what circumstances afforded them with the authority to be self-directed.

Employees' Characteristics

Generally speaking, all FLG members believed that one of the most important factors, which characterized learning, was the concept of open-mindedness. The FLG members' composite definition of open-mindedness related to the willingness to expand on existing knowledge by identifying and researching alternatives to existing paradigms. One FLG member specifically stated that

> it is being open-minded so that a person can see things differently. You can provide knowledge and improve skills, but if people don't have the right attitude, then it's impossible. People have to be open to change and open to explore alternatives. If they come in thinking that they know it all, they it just won't work, there won't be a learning opportunity.

From this respondent's perspective, all staff members in the organization needed to be open to new ideas and to suggestions for learning to occur to begin. Another member of the FLG echoed this sentiment by stating:

> Exploration—in one word, it is probably exploration. It is also curiosity or trying to learn new things and to understand them or at least being aware that there is something else out there. As a business person, there are a lot of things that you have to do. You need a wide breadth of knowledge and less depth. You need to have open consideration of things.

Both of these FLG members believed that employees who were predisposed to learning for the organization were willing to change preconceived notions and to try new things. The focus of these two passages was the individual's intrinsic motivation to change or enhance what was already known. In terms of learning for the organization, these employees brought with them the desire to be more effective and efficient, and they were self-motivated to learn. Presumably,

these employees were self-directed learners who did not require high levels of management intervention in this regard.

Direction

All three of the FLG members believed that they had a responsibility to learn for The Company. They understood that portions of their employment contracts and performance results depended upon their inherent willingness to learn how to improve and increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency. In this section, employees' learning requirements are described by exploring their learning needs. The next segment relates to how their learning was directed by executives. Finally, the FLG members' perceptions of how their self-direction in learning was supported by The Company are explored.

From the FLG members' responses, it was apparent that The Company did not use formal learning objectives to outline what employees had to learn, because all three members specifically stated that none had ever been communicated to them. However, all three respondents were able to provide evidence that informal learning expectations were discussed between them and management.

For two of the FLG members, it was the employee who first determined what had to be learned, which contrasted with the EG members' opinions of which party was more likely to initiate the learning process. Each of these respondents perceived that they had triggered their learning by identifying what was needed to improve personal performance. As an example, one FLG member stated:

> Based on my education, there are some skills that I know I need. So I asked for some training so I could do my job better.

Learning for the organization was based upon the individual's desire to satisfy the need to improve personal performance at a micro level. Additionally, this employee felt qualified to be able to determine what personal need would also benefit The Company, because there was no indication that learning would occur only for personal gain. The emerging property or result from individual learning was that organizational effectiveness and efficiency would eventually be

enhanced from at least one employee's participation in micro development. Another of the FLG members described a similar experience:

> I told them that I wanted to participate in [this type] of training because I felt that my skills were very basic in this area.

Both respondents were of the opinion that they themselves, not management, had determined their learning needs with a view to ultimately increasing personal efficacy. Even without management intervention, both employees had engaged in learning for the purpose of benefiting The Company.

Learning expectations were operationalized in a different manner for the third employee. In this case, the respondent recollected that management had initialized discussions pertaining to more specific learning requirements:

> I don't enjoy working on some things, so I don't. They would like me to get involved in some parts which I don't, like so I am going to delegate those. They are okay with that.

This employee pointedly indicated that if a personal learning need was not going to be fulfilled, learning would not be engaged in. This respondent also perceived that management was aware of this reluctance and was willing to forego its initial request, at least for this specific employee. When there was no match between what the employee felt was needed and what management required, the employee might refuse to learn. Alternatively, when the employee believed that personal needs meshed with The Company's, there was less reluctance to engage in the learning activity. High degrees of management intervention did not always result in employees' learning for the organization:

> For them, I think that they would like me to get into management at some point. They would like me to learn more about management, and if I decide to go that route, I would like to do that.

As a unit, the FLG members felt that it was important to have some control in determining what was required to learn. They all perceived that they had somehow exerted some authority to first decide what was important to them personally. One statement from one of the FLG members encapsulated the composite point of view that employees ultimately learned for the organization after they satisfied their needs.

> I am motivated to learn because of my own expectations, more so than complying to some set of guidelines saying, *"You need this."* I have certain objectives that I need to meet on a certain topic and I need to get to that point. Certainly, there are some things that I don't know. I'll always need to know more. It is just a matter of satisfying myself more than other people's decisions or expectation. It's not for other people to say, "Okay, you've met that, and now go on to other things."

In respect to formal learning objectives, the FLG basically proved out the EG members' comments that stricter guidelines might serve to decrease employees' self-directedness and self-motivation. Employees were more likely to learn what they wanted to learn. More importantly, there was evidence that they all wanted to help The Company, as long as their needs were met first. Learning for the organization occurred after the employee learned for him- or herself first, and it was actually the employee who determined what mandatory learning would be. One of the FLG members provided the summary for this section:

> It should be recognized that what I need is meaningful to me. It may not be of primary importance to the organization, but it should be right up there. I need to know that I am allowed to choose what I need to do and what I need to accomplish. It may not have anything to do with [The Company] immediately. If they want to keep good people in the organization, they had better give [us] what we want; otherwise, there is no purpose for learning.

How Employees' Learning Was Directed

There was a great deal of evidence to show that employees desired direction but only in terms of being guided and not wholly managed by executives. FLG members appreciated management intervention when a learning relationship between employees and executives was formed.

Each of the FLG members was able to recollect and describe a unique learning relationship with a specific manager. The significance of this relationship was primarily that the employee was more likely to learn for the organization when it was perceived that the right amounts of direction was provided by the right manager. For instance, one of the FLG members stated that one executive was especially adept at maintaining a relationship in which the employee felt guided, rather than directed:

> He helps me out a lot because I can talk to him. I think that, out of everyone, he knows me the best, and we are the most alike. I can always go to him to ask how to do things, and he will guide me. I believe that he allows people to try and do it their way and then

> say, "These might be some suggestions for improvement." That's the way he does things most of the time—by sharing his knowledge and experience.

This particular passage had at least four layers of information pertaining to how this employee wanted to be directed in learning. First, the higher the level of value congruency between the parties, the more the executive was trusted and the less "learning risk" the employee had to take. Second, the more the manager was aware of and willing to meet the employee's needs, the more likely it was that the employee would assimilate the guidance. Third, the more the manager used real-life situations to illustrate where the employee had succeeded and possibly failed, the more likely it was that the employee knew why learning was required. Fourth, the longer the manager stayed with the employee in the learning process, the more likely it was that the employee would be amenable to use learning to improve performance. In this case, the manager acted as a facilitator for the employee's learning. Facilitation, not direction, transcended the traditional manager-employee work relationship into a facilitator-learner transaction.

Another of the FLG members showed a greater propensity for taking learning risks by approaching a manager with whom there was less in common or with whom there was a lower level of value congruency:

> I have difficulties with one of the executives—not difficulties about whether we get along; it's just that we don't think in the same way. So my approach with him has to be outside of my comfort zone to make him understand what I am trying to say to him. I have learned the most from him because he is so different from me. It's funny: The one that I hesitate about the most is the one who I have learned the most from.

In tandem, the previous two passages lend credence to the finding that it is more likely for an employee to be guided by a manager who is approachable, trustworthy, and trusting. It was evident that it was the employee who decided who the best manager might be to co-direct the learning process. Both employees continually approached the manager who they thought best fit their learning needs. When a "match" resulted, both parties ultimately co-directed the employee's learning process in a co-dependent relationship.

The existence of co-direction built these employees' beliefs that the executive was a learning leader rather than a learning manager. The major difference between the two was that the learning leader allowed for employee control in determining what was going to be learned.

With control, the employee was more assured that personal needs would be met. Once employees felt that they had the authority to control their learning, they began to shoulder more responsibility in terms of engaging in continuous learning. Finally, the existence of co-direction served to facilitate employees' recognition that they were accountable for learning failures as well as successes, as was evidenced by their acceptance of "improvement" advice.

Mismatches also occurred in The Company. Not all managers were as approachable as others, and when they did not demonstrate a willingness to share directive authority with the employee, the employee became disengaged from learning. The following quotation shows that at least one employee felt that some managers did not allow employees to direct what they would learn and when:

> Sometimes I feel like I should not be doing things that may help me in my job, but that I should just do my job. Once a manager walked in on me, and I thought that it would be perceived that I was just wasting time, so I stopped. I felt resentful, because it is my job and I want to do well at it. I should have been able to do that kind of learning at work. I have never done this kind of learning at work since, and I haven't approached anyone to fix this, either.

The employee-manager relationship in learning was dependent upon the unique participants in the interaction. Not all employees felt that all managers were as willing to share authority. This notion of both the employee and the manager wanting to control and direct the employee's learning could be referred to as *control collision.* It was evident that a mismatch during one learning incident suppressed the employee's desire to engage in subsequent learning ventures. When the respondent did not feel that the manager was trustworthy or trusting in this regard, it was more unlikely that the employee would feel obligated to resolve the issue with the intervening manager, or with any other manager, for that matter. Learning simply stopped. Without shared authority and control, the facilitator-learner relationship might never be formed to springboard the employee's willingness to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for learning.

How Employees' Learning Was Supported

Arguably, the FLG members' opinions pertaining to personal learning needs and the learner-facilitator relationship could have also been included in this section in that appropriate management intervention could also act as a support mechanism for employees' learning. However, the following section is directly related to the FLG members' responses to interview questions about specific factors which The Company supplied to support learning. Generally speaking, the FLG members believed The Company supported employees' learning. However, there was also evidence to show that employees' needs were not always met in this regard. The following section provides a rich description of the FLG members' perceptions regarding how The Company did or did not support employees' learning for the organization.

A Learning Atmosphere

The FLG members provided evidence to show that, in the main, The Company had instated a "learning atmosphere." According to the FLG members, the major components of a learning atmosphere were (a) access to information, (b) safety, and (c) equality.

Access to Information

Generally speaking, the FLG members believed that access to information was one of the most important aspects of a learning atmosphere. Primarily, information gave them the ability to meet personal needs to create choices or alternatives.

One of The Company's credos was "No surprises." This meant that both management and employees should always have the information needed to combat change, to arm oneself with the ability to correct a negative situation, or to take advantage of opportunities. One of the FLG members stated that, for the most part, employees had the information they needed to create choices and to make informed decisions:

> Things are very open and are not hidden. I'm sure that there are a lot of things that happen that we don't know about, but I don't feel that there are a whole bunch of things that we aren't told that we need to know.

This respondent was aware that all employees would not be able to receive all of the information that was needed all of the time. This indicated the acceptance of management's prerogative to

determine what was important for employees to know and when. At times it was appropriate for management not to share some types of information.

This was not the case for another of the FLG members. Here, "no secrets" meant that access to information activated knowledge sharing:

> In a dynamic environment, the group is willing to share, and that is what we are doing. Overall, we are a dynamic group because there are very few secrets. But there are individuals who don't share; they keep The Company stagnant. A stagnant organization is one in which people cannot know any more. It is one which has people who say, "I am just going to keep doing it this way because I don't know what else to do." Most of the people in this organization know enough to say that we have to get information from everyone so that we can constantly try new things.

This FLG member expanded the concept of "No secrets" to mean that everyone in The Company, not specifically front-line or management employees, should be willing to share information for the purpose of being able to create change. Access to information, as was perceived by this employee, gave individuals more control over a situation. The more control the individual had, the fewer the surprises.

This respondent was also concerned that management, specifically, did not share information:

> They keep us up to date with some of the things that are happening, but there are certain things that they don't. They say it is because it is still in progress, and when it becomes an accomplished deed, they will let us know. I don't know if I agree with that. How am I supposed to know what I need to know if things change? It's not going to be my role to provide input on that; I will let other people worry about it.

On the one hand, management believed that "no surprises were good surprises." On the other hand, executives were also known for withholding information that at least one employee felt was needed to plan proactively for learning. This employee sent two messages regarding access to information and its influence on learning. The first related to the employee's desire and ability to use information as a means to activate rather than react to change. Access to information minimized surprises. The second indicated that the practice of withholding information might, in fact, turn a once-dynamic employee into a stagnant one. When stagnancy occurred, the employee was less willing to shoulder more responsibility for learning new things. Access to

information maximized the employee's ability and motivation to create choices, which is an integral part of learning.

Safety

The FLG members unanimously agreed that learning was more likely to occur when employees felt safe and guarded against punishment or judgement when learning outcomes were applied in the workplace:

> First of all, it has to be an environment in which it is safe to grow in and make mistakes in. You don't learn if you don't make mistakes. If you are afraid to make those mistakes, you won't make the effort to learn. I would say that would be important—a safe and comfortable work environment.

This employee stated that safety in learning also meant that employees needed to be trusted to determine learning appropriateness:

> If people are judging you—or even if you perceive that you are being judged—you are not comfortable with sticking your neck out. To learn, you have to go places where you have not gone before, and that is scary. If people are judging you, the support is not there. This kind of trust helps to create a safe environment.

There was an indication that trust and nonjudgement were linked. Management had to trust that employees were capable of determining what had to be learned, how learning outcomes would be implemented, and why successes and failures had occurred, without casting an overcritical eye on any part of the learning process. A learning atmosphere was one in which employees' fears were decreased and personal control was increased.

With safety in check, employees also felt free to learn from trial and error. It was one of the major learning systems employed in The Company because it was operationalized in a manner which did not punish employees for making mistakes:

> I know that it is okay to make mistakes. It is okay to learn from mistakes as long as it doesn't happen over and over again. They expect you to learn from your mistakes, and they make some allowances for this.

Learning from trial and error was negatively reinforced learning because management did not apply unpleasant stimuli when mistakes were made, thereby increasing the employee's

propensity to take risks. For this employee especially, a learning atmosphere based on trial and error learning was one in which risk taking was supported by management.

Equality

When employees and executives shared the same learning philosophies and were engaged in similar learning practices, members of the FLG perceived the learning atmosphere to be based in equality. For one of the FLG members, equality was evident when it was perceived that management activated and modeled learning attitudes and behaviors:

> I think that it comes from the top down. Management shows that they are willing to adapt to learn from their mistakes and to take advice from others. In this organization they know that they have certain skills, but they also know that there are things that they don't know. There are willing to ask for help. I think that is how it starts, from the top down. You can't say that we actually have a learning environment without them actually practicing learning.

Top management support for learning was actually a support mechanism for employees' learning when both parties were of the same mind. "Practicing what was preached" was an integral component of a learning atmosphere, especially when executives were willing to admit that they were not the experts. If executives believed that they could not learn any more, there would be no purpose for employees' learning for the organization because nothing would change. In this sense, a learning atmosphere was characterized as being a nonexpert environment or one in which everyone was obligated to recognize the need for and take ownership of their own development.

Another employee felt equal to management because executives made allowances for personal interest learning, just as they might do for themselves:

> I never have to apologize about personal interests, about different opinions, or about bringing in my own resources. Other companies don't want that. They don't understand that any type of learning that I do will help them eventually. As long as I am doing my job well, I am free to explore. This company provides for that, and I have to give them credit.

Equality was generated when management considered the "whole" person and his or her real and potential contributions from learning. Additionally, this respondent believed it was important for the employee to feel as free or as empowered to choose as executives were perceived to be.

The FLG members also believed that any perceptions of inequality would serve to hinder the employee's motivation to learn continuously for the organization. Inequality surfaced more when executives did not put employees' learning outcomes into practice—when they did not practice what they preached in terms of applying knowledge. One of the FLG members stated that

> there is frustration when I give suggestions to managers, but they do not do what I said they should do—even when they tell me that it was a good idea. It makes you wonder why things are being done the way they are. It makes you wonder why you are learning or helping them to learn to begin with. If they want it done one way, why don't they just do it that way instead of patronizing me?

Another of the FLG members echoed a similar sentiment:

> By not considering my ideas, someone may play down someone else's accomplishments or education.

Executives were perceived to be more likely to model preliminary stages of learning: gaining information and creating choices. However, at least two of the employees felt that their equality was being compromised when executives did not operationalize the more advanced stage of applying what was learned. When employees did not feel that their learning for the organization had a definite purpose, they did not feel supported. This lack of support minimized the employees' propensity to shoulder more responsibility, decreased accountability, and demotivated the employee from wanting to engage in continuous learning for the organization. Learning for the organization seemed to have to result in organizational change so that the learning would be perceived to be worthwhile.

Another of the FLG members speculated that inequalities were more likely to increase because The Company was becoming larger in size and more diverse in service. The more that executives had to do, the less likely it was that they would have the time to approach employees for their suggestions:

> There is still a noticeable separation between employees and management. They say that this is a flat organization, but the hierarchy is still there. They still want to keep some things separate. It has changed over the last six to eight months here in Alberta. It used to be very, very open. As the business grows, there are going to be more layers that we will have to go through. I am getting separated farther and farther away. I can understand why it is happening, but at the same time I wish that it wasn't.

Structural changes to the organization were leading to imbalances in equality. Whereas there were once team learning experiences, isolated learning pockets were beginning to form. Employees had an ongoing need to know that management was learning just as they were. The greater the perceived distance between manager and employee, the greater the employee's disbelief that management support would continue for employee learning.

Recognition and Rewards

The final section pertaining to employees' support of their learning for the workplace relates to recognition and rewards. In the main, the FLG members believed that intrinsic reward was the most integral motivator one could experience to persist in learning. They learned simply because they wanted to and not because they felt that they had to. Notwithstanding personal satisfaction, these employees also believed that their learning should be recognized and that a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards should be offered. One way that employees felt their learning should be recognized was to have management actually implement what they had learned for the organization, a subject which was broached earlier in this section. Another was to know and feel that management was applying recognition and rewards equitably.

Equity related to the FLG members' perceptions that each employee was able to get a fair share of recognition and rewards for learning from executives. This topic surfaced during all of the interview sessions for two main reasons. First, it related to employees' needs to know that executives valued their learning accomplishments. Consistent recognition meant that the employee was a consistent contributor. Second, by virtue of their secondary roles as business-development advisors, the employees perceived themselves, like the executives, as The Company's caretakers or stewards. Employees were aware that The Company had set aside limited amounts of capital for extraordinary learning resources. Demand for workshops and materials which The Company did not readily have on hand was higher than supply. Employees

needed to know that those who were most deserving were receiving their just allotments of recognition and rewards.

Two of three FLG members were able to recount incidents where management supplied direct recognition and rewards for their learning achievements. For one, recognition and rewards had more to do with being privy to information:

> The directors tell people what other people are doing in terms of workshop attendance. They will bring it up—first they will make sure that we are okay with letting people know what we are doing—and say that so-and-so is doing such a thing. They will let us know what that person should be getting from the course. I think that it is important to show that people are learning. It's not just that people are being sent somewhere for no purpose.

This passage strongly indicates this employee's appreciation of knowing what others were doing with The Company's scarce resources over and above being the subject of executives' public congratulatory announcements. Being able to attain resources meant the employee was recognized and rewarded simultaneously. This employee believed that learning should be rewarded with extraordinary resources only when it had a specific and direct purpose. Anticipated learning outcomes for the organization had to be worthwhile to warrant resource expenditures by the organization. Learning for the organization should be rewarded with more learning opportunities only when the subsequent learning had purpose.

The same employee also realized that company resources might not actually be distributed equitably between management and employees:

> Unfortunately, I don't think that it really works that way all of the time. They are going to a workshop, and they mentioned this at a staff meeting, but that was about as far as it went in terms of what they were going to do there. What is the purpose? To me, if they are going to go one way to tell people what my own or another's purpose is for going on a course, they should go the other way and say what they are doing and why.

Apparently, there was a difference between was appropriate for employees and management. Either the employee was not told why management was going on training, or it was not believed that the training would have substantive organizational purpose.

It seemed, on first blush, that there was equity between employees in terms of recognition and rewards for learning because each of the FLG members was able to recount

incidents where this type of learning support was provided to them by at least one executive. One employee had been given extra time and compensation from job enrichment or to learn how to complete tasks which were different from normal, routinized work activities. Two others were allowed to take time off work to attend a course that was unrelated to The Company's needs. Finally, all of The Company's staff members were rewarded with a lunch to commemorate their contributions on receiving the "learning" award.

On the other hand, one of the FLG members was also of the opinion that all employees were not able to share in either the Company's extraordinary or ordinary resources to the same degree that others were. The distribution of recognition and rewards was influenced by three factors—namely, competency, time constraints, and tenure—which the following three quotations illustrate, respectively:

> Like I said, I feel that they respect me more than they do some of my co-workers. I get to have more tools and things because of this. I think that it is because of my learning results or my professionalism or whatever you want to call it.

This passage indicated that "proven" or competent learners possibly were supported more readily than those who were not. It also suggested that management might value some types of learning outcomes more than others.

However, another of the FLG members' statements contradicted the previous one. It was stated that an employee who had accomplished some organizational learning achievement might not be recognized for the accomplishment:

> I feel like the progress that I have made in my job from learning new things has not really been acknowledged voluntarily on their part. They recognize me when I ask them to. I don't think that it is done a lot. It's not initiated for me on their part.

Recognition and rewards were not distributed equitably. Another of the FLG members suggested that amounts of recognition and rewards were dwindling due to the executives' preoccupation with organizational changes. There might simply have been less time for managers to devote to identifying and supporting employees' learning needs in this regard.

Another respondent suggested that employees had to spend considerable time learning for the organization before The Company would reward that learning:

> I wouldn't say that everyone gets the same things around here; I think that it is something that you earn around here. If you give, they give you back. I needed a little time to do a few things, and it was given to me without question. I know that other people have asked for this time and have not been given it. So I think that it depends on who you are.

This employee did not know how much time needed to pass before management would consider rewarding an employee; nor was it known how much an employee had to give before The Company would reciprocate.

When executives did provide recognition and rewards to employees, they sometimes supplied the wrong type. One employee recognized that executives used job redesign, specifically, job enlargement, to minimize work-related boredom without also offering compatible increases in pay and responsibility in terms of promotions:

> This company often uses the carrot to get us to perform or stay. This approach is starting to wear thin.

The employee did not perceive rewards to have value when they were applied for the sake of meeting management's needs by and large. This passage strongly indicated that rewards sometimes were seen to manipulate employees into learning more so that they would do more. What management perceived to be a positive stimulus to reinforce behavior was not always considered to be so by the employee. If the incorrect motivator was applied, it was likely that the employee would be demotivated from learning for The Company.

Summary

This chapter began with a description of The Company in which the research was undertaken. The Company is typical of other small, privately owned, for-profit organizations in that it has a strong clan culture or one which has specific missions and goals which are communicated to all internal staff members as a means to promote workforce cohesiveness and standardized operating practices. Like other small organizations, The Company has a close-knit group of staff members who highly influence each other's work processes. What makes this company different from other organizations is its preoccupation with adult learning philosophies and practices. First, The Company's core business is to educate adult learners. Second, it relies

heavily on its internal labor force's motivation and abilities to deliver educational services to its customers. Third, it was a company which was recognized by both its front-line employees and external agencies such as The Learning Link in Edmonton, Alberta, as a human resource development leader. It was The Company's business to know how to help people learn.

A rich description of direction and support for employees' learning for the organization was provided. The major topics discussed fell under the general headings of (a) employees' characteristics, (b) mandatory learning, and (c) learning atmosphere for both the EG and FLG members' responses. In most cases, both groups shared the same general feeling that employees' learning was directed and supported in a way that provided the employee with some authority to control what was to be learned for the organization and with what support mechanisms. The composite view of all respondents was that, most of the time, learning was managed in a participative manner.

There was general consensus that The Company's internal workforce was predisposed to being self-directed in learning for the organization because they were continually seeking out ways to improve their work performance. With few exceptions, employees were satisfied that their learning needs were being supported at a micro or job level because they had the freedom, by and large, to determine what learning would meet their own and the organization's goals. Generally speaking, learning was managed participatively between executives and employees.

There were cases, however, where learning fell away from participation toward a more authoritarian style of management, which was more likely to hinder the employee's motivation to participate in learning for the organization.

Employees were more likely to contribute their knowledge and experience at tactical levels or at the stage when their commitment was needed to operationalize high-level or strategic decisions. Typically, employees were accustomed to having the authority to determine what they needed to learn without high levels of management direction at micro levels of development. All of the FLG members, without fail, perceived themselves to be in control of initiating the learning process in terms of deciding what had to be learned for their jobs. High

levels of employee control with low levels of management direction could result in the employee's refusal to learn for the organization.

A learning atmosphere was described by both EG and FLG members as one in which employees were able to acquire and apply knowledge safely. Both EG and FLG members believed that employees' learning successes and failures were supported in most cases. However, employees were reluctant to persist in learning for the organization when they felt that there was no purpose for attaining learning outcomes, when they perceived that management was not implementing their contributions acquired from learning, when executives did not treat employees as equals, and when recognition and rewards were not provided equitably. Employees who did not feel that their learning ultimately helped the organization were less likely to learn for the organization.

As a general rule, the front-line employees were willing and able to learn more for the organization when they had some control over what was needed to be learned and when they were appreciated for their learning efforts. Management wanted employees to have this control, but executives did not always facilitate employees' learning in a manner which was participative. The overall picture painted by the respondents showed that The Company's front-line employees were ready, willing, and able to be self-directed in learning for the organization, but executives did not always create a balance of control or support learning consistently.

The next chapter compares and contrasts the findings from the EG and FLG members' responses and discusses them in terms of what the literature considers to be "best practice."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter explores the parallels and intersections between the responses attained from the executive group (EG) and the front-line employees' group (FLG) and compares these findings to discussions of "best practice" from the literature review. This information is segmented into three main parts: (a) description of front-line employees, (b) support of employees' self-direction in learning, and (c) learning atmosphere.

Description of Front-Line Employees

The employees in The Company were self-directed learners who felt obligated to use self-directed learning to benefit the organization. All showed a propensity for taking the initiative to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources needed for learning, choose learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975) to improve personal performance. The employees characterized themselves as being open-minded and willing to integrate new ideas with their existing knowledge, and they were ready, willing, and able to view work as a learning opportunity. Management characterized employees as having the "ethos" for learning and for having a "helping attitude" in terms of completing extra learning tasks which contributed to organizational development. The front-line employees in The Company were self-directed in their learning for the organization.

Support of Employees' Self-Direction in Learning

In most cases The Company supported its employees' needs to be self-directed in their learning for the organization. The literature will be revisited in this regard in a discussion of key informants' responses surrounding the topics of formal learning objectives, learning relationships, and recognition and rewards.

Formal Learning Objectives

The reason that formal learning objectives or any other formal monitoring systems were not used in the Company was primarily due to management's perception that they might actually curb employees' self-directedness, a supposition which was supported by Bierema (1996). Executives felt that, generally, employees were responsible learners who were self-motivated to engage in learning activities which would benefit the organization without this type of management intervention. Each of the FLG members provided responses which indicated that management's assumptions in this regard were accurate.

One employee in particular was adamant about maintaining the ability to determine what learning was needed for the organization: "I am motivated to learn because of my own expectations, more so than complying to some set of guidelines saying, *'You need this.'*" In The Company, formal learning objectives were considered by one employee and both executives to be unnecessary, a finding which was not found to be supported in the literature under monitoring systems (Bierema, 1996; Caffarella, 1994; Certo, 1997; Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Fownes, 1997; Gayeski, 1996; Gayle, 1990; Geber, 1995; Haney, 1997; Harris, 1998; Knowles, 1989; Mager, 1985; Phillips, 1991; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996; Zemke, 1998; Zemke & Zemke, 1995).

Two incidents from the findings show that employees are not likely to learn for the organization with or without formal management intervention in this regard. One of the FLG members recalled that management verbalized learning expectations to employees. However, the result of this incident was that the employee "set aside" management's request. Without written learning objectives, important and required learning for the organization might not occur, which was an issue identified by Starke and Sexty (1998), Certo (1997), Wright et al. (1996), and Mager (1984).

There was an indication that learning objectives or other monitoring systems might not increase an employee's motivation to engage in learning for the organization, regardless of how formal the request. One employee stated: "I don't enjoy working on some things, so I don't. They

would like me to get involved in some parts which I don't like, so I am going to delegate those." The process of negotiating learning objectives' content might not result in learning for the organization in any case, which contrasted with Knowles' suppositions (1989). In the eyes of the employees, learning for the organization was predicated upon having their needs met first. The findings show that the content of these goals must be highly congruent with the learner's needs; otherwise, the employee is not likely to engage in self-directed learning for the organization. Baskett (1993) also found this to be true in his study.

Learning Relationships

None of the respondents used a specific term to define and describe learning relationships between executives and employees. However, I saw these interactions as strongly linked with mentoring, a subset of informal learning processes falling within the domain of social learning philosophy (Haney, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). In The Company, executives fulfilled the roles of informal educators by being committed to sharing their experiences and knowledge (Callendar, 1992) with employees. Concomitantly, two of three FLG members characterized these relationships as being informal, one-on-one learning sessions held between an employee and an executive. As a set, these characteristics pointed to the employee's use of more traditional forms of mentoring (Galbraith & Cohen, 1997; Haney, 1997).

What is different from the literature on modern mentoring practices is that in The Company, these relationships were not purposeful groupings, formally planned and designed by others to induce an employee's learning for the organization, as seems to be the current trend (Fritz, 1997; Haney, 1997). These learning relationships were initiated by employees as a means to further their self-directed learning plans. In these cases, informal learning was planned and controlled largely by the employees, which shows support for the literature in terms of differentiating self-direction from self-directed learning.

Each of two employees had very different needs in terms of why one executive was chosen over another as a mentor. For one employee, high levels of value congruency between

the mentor and protégé were the deciding factor. For the other employee, learning from mentoring had much more to do with seeking out new knowledge from an executive who did not share the same value set, as two separate but interrelated statements indicate: "It's just that we don't think in the same way," and "It's funny: The one I hesitate about the most is the one who I have learned the most from." In comparison to the previous respondent, this employee had a much higher propensity for risk taking in learning. The reason both employees continued to participate in these relationships was that they had chosen their own mentors based upon personal needs. The findings differ from the literature in respect to the protégé's ability to choose the mentor in more formalized systems (Galbraith & Cohen, 1997; Haney, 1997), yet learning still occurred.

I also perceived that these learning relationships in The Company were predicated upon tenets of Garrison's (1997) teacher-learner transaction in terms of managers' willingness to be informal educators (Callendar, 1992) who were willing to afford employees the authority to control and plan their self-directed learning in this regard. What was not specifically stated in the literature was that the teacher-learner transaction has application to the workplace in terms of the manager-employee or facilitator-learner transaction which is discussed in the findings under the section of learning relationships.

When the facilitator-learner transaction was not balanced in the workplace, the employee experienced a control collision, as was indicated by the following comment: "Once a manager walked in on me, and I thought that it would be perceived that I was just wasting time, so I stopped." In terms of self-directedness here, there was no agreement between the manager and employee about what was to be learned and when. The same employee went on to say, "I felt resentful, because it is my job and I want to do well at it. . . . And I have not approached anyone to fix this, either." This case refuted the EG members' premise that the workplace supported all employees' self-direction and self-directed learning choices. Not all employees were empowered to co-manage their learning processes; nor were their efforts always rewarded in this regard. The executive also did not always model learning leader behavior in terms of

practicing two-way communication, which is not indicative of that which is required for the facilitator-learner transaction. Consequently, the findings give credence to the literature, which showed that employees' propensity to internalize external goals and learn for the workplace is predicated upon a balance of authority to implement self-directed learning choices (Callendar, 1992; Garrison, 1997; Medina, 1995; Tough, 1971, cited in Caffarella, 1986).

A quality facilitator-learner relationship in the workplace is productive when predicated upon Theory Y management, participative management, and two-way communication, which the literature also supported (Certo, 1997; Garrison, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996). Specifically, Starke and Sexty's comments pertaining to maturity theory were also supported in the findings: "When managers fail to recognize subordinate maturity, they create a counterproductive work environment" (p. 442). Baskett's (1993) request for guidelines specifying how self-directed learning is to be operationalized was supported; they would likely have prevented control collision between the manager and employee. Concomitantly, learning contracts with formal learning objectives would also serve to mitigate control collisions because they would serve to document "learning rules" which both the mentor and the protégé are to follow, a posit which was also evidenced in the literature (Certo, 1997; Palmer, 1992; Starke & Sexty, 1998). Bierema's (1996) fear that the imposition of formalization on self-directed learning might decrease self-direction contrasts with the findings. For at least one employee, there is evidence to suggest that self-directedness was more likely to be minimized because no formality had been introduced.

A Learning Atmosphere

The following section discusses the literature in terms of FLG members' opinions regarding how their self-directedness in learning for the organization was supported by three specific factors: access to information, safety, and equality.

Access to Information

One employee viewed the learning atmosphere in The Company as open or one in which management had few secrets not shared with front-line staff members. For this employee, it was considered to be acceptable practice for management to withhold certain types of information. One executive corroborated this finding by explaining that the rationale for withholding information was meant to protect employees rather than to impede their ability to be self-directed: "We don't want to people's expectations raised that we are going to charge off and open a pizza training school or something and then find out that we just haven't been able to get A and B together on it." Centralized decision making was employed by managers when they were engaged in high-level or strategic planning, a finding which was consistent with Wright et al. (1996), in terms of their statement that participative management is not always supported in an organization. This finding is also consistent with Starke and Sexty's (1998) belief that managers did not always consider employees to be competent or mature enough to participate at this level of decision making.

The result of employees' nonparticipation in this regard was that executives had unilateral decision-making ability to control what employees needed to know for the organization at a macro level, which was a circumstance vexing another employee, who said, "I don't know if I agree with that. How am I supposed to know what I need to know if things change? It's not going to be my role to provide input on that. I will let other people worry about it." Outside of expressing disagreement with management's decision, this employee also indicated that it was likely that entering motivation to seek responsibility for continued learning would be minimized. The employee perceived that there was no choice but to "wait and see."

These findings point to the fact that "selecting between the lesser of two evils" may not be considered a choice at all, and they support Garrison's (1997) contention that providing opportunities for control and choice at the very beginning of the learning phase is important to self-directed learning entering motivation (see Figure 2.2). Garrison's models show that anticipated control is closely linked to personal and contextual characteristics, which the findings

support. The employee was barred from gaining required information; consequently, there was a lack of willingness to create a contingency plan, so entering motivation to be self-directed about learning how to fix the problem was decreased. When faced with such a dilemma at the outset of the learning experience, the learner is not likely to take responsibility for learning in terms of self-monitoring in the long run. Denying a learner access to information is one method to dissuade employees from being self-directed in their learning.

Because the components of Garrison's (1997) SDL model are interrelated, negative impacts on motivation will also decrease the learner's ability to self-manage and self-monitor learning; this is a domino effect, which Garrison also described. What is not explicitly explained by Garrison's model is why access to information is important to a learner in the context of the workplace. Without information, uncertainty arises, which leads to apathy; the employee is not motivated to gain control because he or she does not feel responsible for contributing in this regard. When management does not act in a way that facilitates employee empowerment, the employee is less likely to want to be innovative and self-directed.

Maturity theory has a pervasive influence here, as well. Garrison's (1997) entering motivation model suggests that the motivation to enter into triple loop learning (Argyris, 1991) is minimized when employees perceive that they must be too immature to deal with the situation; otherwise management would not have withheld the information. Because the employee was not able to access information, there was also no ability or motivation to make decisions. One of the executive's responses also helps to prove this supposition: "They will learn because there is buy-in. They have generated the values." When access to information, participative management, decentralized decision making, and two-way communication exist, learners are able to manage the learning process. Consequently, Ravid's (1987) contention that SDL does not work in highly centralized environments applies to this situation, as does Baskett's (1993) discovery that high individual involvement from both management and employees is needed to support SDL in the workplace. Garrison's (1997) SDL and entering motivation models provide the theoretical framework to illustrate why employee apathy toward self-directed learning in the workplace might

occur, which is information not made explicit in the literature. Additionally, the surfacing of this employee's needs pertaining to access to information, means that content theory of motivation might also have a strong connection to Garrison's model, which is not evidenced in the literature. These findings show that there is a strong link between content and process theory in that one might not be able to be considered in isolation of the other, which is also not made explicit in the literature (Certo, 1997; Garrison, 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998).

Safety

The literature provided ample evidence to support both the FLG and EG members' perceptions that "safety" was a primary factor which allowed employees to be self-directed in their learning (Argyris, 1991; Hequet, 1996; Medina, 1995; Piskurich; 1994; Rao, 1995; Zemke & Zemke, 1995;). In terms of goal setting (Starke & Sexty, 1998), employees were more likely to achieve their personal learning goals in The Company because they were able to activate choices about what they wanted to learn in a safe environment. The only finding which would lead one to believe otherwise has been discussed under learning relationships. Overall, there is no evidence to show that employees were not supported when mistakes in learning were made, thereby increasing their motivation to take risks and to be innovative.

Both the FLG and the EG members were in agreement that The Company not only supported learning from trial and error, but also encouraged it. This support mechanism also decreased employees' fears and increased their motivation to be self-directed in learning, which was found to be supported in the literature in terms of safety. One executive specifically stated that the only caveat to trial and error learning was that the same mistakes should not be made repeatedly. Harris (1998) did not support learning from trial and error or other informal learning processes unless there is some measurement mechanism in place to monitor "hidden costs" of "learning as you go." Starke and Sexty (1998), Certo (1997), Duval (1996), Wright et al. (1996) and Kaufman, Keller, and Watkins (1995) also alluded to the fact nonmonitored performance might lead to "learning derailments" in terms of not knowing when management intervention is

required. The literature stated that, on the one hand, support for learning from trial and error is a necessary component for sparking employee initiative; but on the other, it also said that some sort of "control valve" is required (Bierema, 1996; Caffarella, 1994; Gayle, 1990). The findings differ from these authors' contentions because no monitoring systems were in place for trial and error learning, yet there was no evidence to suggest that management intervention in this regard was required.

Equality

With few exceptions, there was general agreement between the FLG and EG members that management viewed employees as equals to executives in terms of being learning partners. One employee specifically stated that the learning atmosphere was enhanced because managers modeled learning behaviors they wished employees to put into practice. The "practice what you preach" method of learning reinforcement was corroborated in the literature (Haney, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), as was Wright et al.'s (1996) contention that any operating system needed to have top management support to be effective.

There was also evidence in the findings to show that equality had its limitations in some circumstances. Two employees experienced frustration when management did not "go all the way" to apply what they had learned from employees. In two separate but related statements, one of the FLG members expressly stated that "there is frustration when I give suggestions to managers, but they do not do what I said they should do—even when they tell me that it was a good idea. . . . It makes you wonder why you are learning or helping them to learn to begin with." Management stated that they coveted an employee's "helping attitude," but apparently it was appreciated only to a certain extent.

In terms of the literature, Garrison's (1997) SDL model explains that self-directed learners self-monitor learning in terms of taking responsibility for changing their perspectives as a result of learning. In terms of equality, they also believe that managers should do the same. If managers do not model this behavior, the learner is likely to remember that past efforts for

learning did not matter, and they are less likely to be motivated to enter into future learning ventures for the organization.

The effort to performance component for an employee is highly dependent upon what is done with learning outcomes after the effort is expended. Ironically, one manager specifically stated that an integral part of learning was application: "The third level of learning is when one can take that knowledge, synthesize it, and apply it to a new situation. If you can't perform it, then you have not learned it." The findings also show that employees were not only willing to engage in learning for the organization, but they were also able to self-monitor the learning process because they had applied what had been learned. The results of their self-monitoring convinced them that there was not always a purpose for expending effort to learn for the organization. Employees were demotivated when management expected them to learn for the organization, but the organization did not change as a result of their learning: "It makes you wonder why you are learning or helping them to learn to begin with."

In the literature review, I speculated that learning could be viewed as a job, especially as it relates to learning for the workplace. The employee who perceived that the learning did not matter or did not have purpose experienced dissatisfaction due to low levels of task identity, task significance, and feedback, which can described by the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; cited in Schermerhorn et al., 1997). These authors did not specifically state that the theory could be applied to a learning job, but the findings from The Company support this application, especially when those who are doing the job for The Company have a high desire for self-direction. Ultimately, poor learning task design in terms of this situation might lead to the employee's reluctance to fulfill the role of steward or one who is willing to engage in continuous learning as a means to help the organization meet its goals. This contention was supported by Harris' (1998) belief that stewardship is integral to employees' continued willingness to create new knowledge for the organization.

Whereas maturity theory has been used, in the main, to explain management's perceptions of employees' competency, its application here is reversed. The findings indicate

that immaturity can also be applied to executives on behalf of employees, which was not stated in the literature (Starke & Sexty, 1998). Consequently, it seems reasonable to believe that this employee may want to activate assessment in The Company as a means to evaluate management's performance in learning for the purpose of measuring equality, which is also a concept not explicitly documented in the literature.

The literature stated that in order to maintain participative management as a means to facilitate equality, an organization must be structured in a manner which is conducive to sustained management and employee interaction (Bierema, 1996; Wright et al., 1996). Although the separation between management and employees in terms of position power and role differentiation was relatively narrow, one employee felt that the distance between them was beginning to widen. Organizational growth was beginning to divide the team:

> It has changed over the last six to eight months here in Alberta. It used to be very, very open. As the business grows, there are going to be more layers that we will have to go through. I am getting separated farther and farther away.

In this employee's estimation, the larger the organization grew, the more it was becoming "mechanistic" or bureaucratic, which led to fewer opportunities for the employee to interact on an equal footing with top management. This finding corroborates Bierema's (1996) fear that within organizations which become obsessed with growth, there are fewer opportunities to treat employees as equals because managers do not have the time to support participative management.

Equity: Recognition and Rewards

This section discusses the issue of equity as it pertains to the distribution of recognition and rewards from management in support of employees' learning for the organization.

All members of the FLG were able to recount incidents for which executives recognized employees' learning by providing a mixture of extraordinary resources (attendance at workshops) and ordinary resources (verbal accolades). At least one executive believed that management members were conscientious and consistent providers of learning recognition in terms of "patting

people on the back." This is evident in the statement, "It's not recognized with dollars; it is recognized more with kudos and a 'Well Done!'" One employee specifically expressed appreciation for executives' private and public pronouncements: "I think that it is important to show that people are learning."

In the same breath, however, this same employee provided information to indicate that extraordinary resources for learning were not always distributed equitably between employees and management:

> Unfortunately, I don't think that it really works that way all of the time. They are going to a workshop, and they mentioned this at a staff meeting, but that was about as far as it went in terms of what they were going to do there. What is the purpose?

Distribution of rewards had much to do with facilitating the employee's perception that there was equity between management and employees in terms of "who was getting what" and why, which was also highly related to equity theory. This finding was supported by Starke and Sexty (1998) in terms of work-related compensation, but their contentions do not include consideration of learning rewards, specifically. This finding is also not made explicitly evident in the literature on adult education (Zemke, 1998; Zemke & Zemke, 1995).

Two employees believed that recognition and rewards were not being distributed equitably among employees, which was a perception that at least one executive knew to be true. This manager stated that, as a matter of fact, some employees were more able to attain extraordinary resources because of their tenure, competency, and overall maturity or experience levels, which indicates that Spikes' (1995) supposition about rewards for "knowing" might be held in higher esteem than "rewards for learning."

Alternatively, another employee's response gave rise to the possibility that recognition for learning was more likely to be provided to "proven" learners. This concept was not explicitly documented in the literature review, but it did surface in Chapter 1 of this study (Wright et al., 1998), in terms of organizations' tendencies to reward "proven" learners with more learning.

Finally, one employee stated that management used recognition and rewards to outwardly "push" an employee into accepting more learning responsibility for the clandestine

purpose of having the learner also complete more work without receiving more benefits. This employee did not perceive that some of management's recognition and reward tactics provided value to the learner: "This company often uses the carrot to get us to perform or stay. This approach is starting to wear thin." Management's belief that job enlargement supported continuous learning in the workplace was inaccurate as far as this employee was concerned. The section of the literature review which relates specifically to recognition and rewards for learning does not explicitly indicate that such tactics might eventually demotivate an otherwise self-directed learner from learning for the organization (Fritz, 1997; Marsick & Watkins, 1992). On the other hand, learning-assessment literature indicated that negotiation of learning guidelines and objectives would provide an avenue for two-way communication, which, in turn, is more likely to mitigate negative effects from inappropriate reward distribution (Duval, 1996; Fritz, 1997; Kaufman, Keller, & Watkins, 1995).

Summary

In terms of the EG and FLG members' perceptions regarding The Company's support for employees' self-direction in learning for the organization, there were very few instances where it was found that executives and employees disagreed. Alternatively, the issues for which there was no intersection in this regard influenced employees' self-direction to the extent that they were not motivated to continue learning at all times. These stops and starts did not further executives' goals to maintain a learning atmosphere, which was conducive to increasing employees' propensity to be self-directed in their learning for work.

The Company's management activities did not always intersect what the literature considered to be best practice in regard to support of employees' self-directedness. The most notable parallel in this regard related to issues surrounding monitoring systems for learning activities. The literature overwhelmingly supported the inclusion of some type of system which could be seen to provide checks and balances for both employee and management intervention in learning processes. Many of the findings point to the need to assess employees' and

management's performance in terms of fulfilling their roles as learners and, specifically, executives' responsibilities for applying recognition and rewards for learning consistently and equitably.

Generally speaking, Garrison's (1997) SDL and entering motivation models explained why many of the control collisions were occurring in The Company. Consequently, his contentions were supported by the findings to a large degree. Garrison's posits, however, did not fully explain the role of equity theory, maturity theory, and content theories of motivation in his depictions of self-directed learning.

Finally, there are gaps in the literature. Analysis of the findings shows that adult learning documentation does not always apply, specifically and explicitly, to the workplace; and human resource management sources do not always apply, specifically and explicitly, to adult learning theory. If both management and employees are to learn how to learn to maintain a workplace environment which supports self-directed learning, adult learning theory and human resource management theory need to have more intersections which apply to specific workplace contexts. In this way, all types of employees are more likely to become more responsible and accountable for improving and increasing organizational effectiveness and efficiency. "People at all levels of the organization must combine the mastery of some highly technical expertise with the ability to work effectively in teams, form productive relationships with clients and customers, and critically reflect on and then change their own practices" (Argyris, 1991, p. 100).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides information on the following topics: (a) research context of the study, (b) purpose of the study, (c) method, (d) responses to research questions, (e) conclusions, (f) recommendations, and (g) personal reflections.

Research Context of the Study

Some literature suggested (e.g., Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Gayeski, 1996; Geber, 1995) that training and development (T&D) programs did not always help to meet organizational goals for improving and increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace. Regardless of what types of T&D the organization offered to them, employees might still not learn. Bierema (1996) and Rothwell and Sredl (1992) proposed that workplace learning is hindered by scientific and mechanistic management principles which create teacher-centered learning activities which the learner has no authority to control in terms of what is to be learned and how. Consequently, employees do not always feel responsible for learning for the organization. This is due largely to the fact that they have no decision-making authority regarding personal management of their learning. Employees who are asked to learn under these conditions have no stake in the learning because what they are directed to learn may not be meaningful to them. When employees' only choice is to comply with others' decisions, it is less likely that they will feel accountable for personal learning.

Alternatively, Garrison (1997) posited that learners are more likely to engage in meaningful knowledge attainment when they have some control in managing their learning process. This supposition intersects with the practice of participative management philosophies in the workplace. Starke and Sexty (1998), Certo, 1997, Schermerhorn et al. (1997), and Wright et al. (1996) believed that participative management increases employees' willingness and abilities to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for their work activities when they are

afforded the authority to create and implement personal choices. Similarly, employees have a bigger stake in the organization with participative, collaborative management of learning processes between the facilitator and learner. They are therefore encouraged to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for learning in the workplace.

Purpose of the Study

Employees might not view company-sponsored T&D programs as learning opportunities if they do not have the ability to self-direct their learning for the workplace. The purpose of this study was to explore how direction and support of front-line employees' learning for the organization was operationalized in one privately-owned, for-profit organization which was recognized to be a human resource development leader by both its internal labor force and external agencies. The study was guided by one main research question; namely, What constitutes a learning opportunity in the workplace? The primary inquiry was underpinned by two subquestions: (a) What were the executive managers' perceptions of the circumstances which helped to create learning opportunities in regard to direction and support? and (b) What were the front-line employees' perceptions of the circumstances which helped to create learning opportunities in regard to direction and support?

Method

This study was built upon the tenets of naturalistic inquiry as a means to create a body of knowledge which reflected the perspectives of two different types of respondent groups from one natural setting. The executive group (EG) comprised two owner-executives, and the front-line group (FLG) comprised three front-line employees from The Company. The Company was purposefully chosen because of its recently acquired status as human resource development leader in this province and because of convenience. Selection of key informants was predicated upon their willingness to participate and evidence that they had engaged in some form of company-sponsored T&D program.

Because the study dealt with the exploration of respondents' perceptions, a qualitative approach to the research was used, and information was created through the operationalization of semistructured interviews. Planning and implementation of data collection and analysis activities were completed under the literary guidance of Berg (1998), Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), Guba (1981), and Bogdan and Biklen (1992). Finally, data trustworthiness was addressed by exploring the issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba, 1981).

Responses to Research Questions

One main research question and two research subquestions guided this study. The following section addresses the subquestions and then the main inquiry.

Subquestion 1

What were the executive managers' perceptions of the circumstances which helped to create learning opportunities in regard to direction and support?

The findings from the EG members' responses point out that executives were, in the main, firmly entrenched in Theory Y management philosophy, or the belief that The Company's employees were self-motivated to learn for the organization. In terms of direction, executives perceived that three main practices underscored the operationalization of this belief. The first was participative management, whereby employees were afforded the authority to create and implement their own learning decisions in collaboration with management.

The second activity was two-way communication. Collaboration was predicated upon two-way communication, which in terms of direction meant that management was able to build upon employees' *entering motivation* (Garrison, 1997) to engage in self-directed learning for the organization by sharing knowledge with employees and soliciting their feedback. Two-way communication in The Company was used as the means to have employees internalize external goals because it "paved the way" for negotiation between executives and employees.

The third factor which increased these employees' *entering motivation* to be self-directed in learning for the organization was access to information, which is explained by Garrison's

(1997) SDL model as it applied to the EG's information-sharing practices at both strategic and tactical levels of decision making. At strategic levels of decision making, management did not afford employees the information needed to ascertain the purpose for learning (self-monitoring); consequently, employees were not able to begin self-management of their learning. At tactical levels, employees were given the information needed to enter into self-management and self-monitoring of what needed to be learned, how, and why. Participative management, two-way communication, and access to information increased employees' self-directedness to enter into self-directed learning for the organization. Concomitantly, these three factors were predicates to the creation and maintenance of a learning atmosphere; an environment which supports employees' self-directed learning decisions.

The findings from the EG members' responses point out that employees' learning activities were supported by the existence of a learning atmosphere, which, in this setting, comprised four main factors: (a) employee empowerment, (b) trial and error learning, (c) executives' modeling of learning behavior, and (d) recognition and rewards. In this context employee empowerment had more to do with fostering a sense of stewardship in employees. They were able to contribute to the organization by being afforded the authority to create and implement personal learning choices; they felt trusted. Consequently, employees became more responsible and accountable for learning which would benefit the organization as a whole.

Executives believed that they maintained an environment in which employees were supported in learning from trial and error. Learning opportunities were generated when employees held themselves accountable for their decision making. For this to occur, employees had to feel that their learning atmosphere was safe to allow risk-taking.

Executives believed that they modeled this same persistence with respect to their own learning practices. In their estimate, top management's continuous learning behavior modeling "bred" continuous learning behavior in employees.

Finally, the learning atmosphere was characterized as one in which recognition and rewards were conscientiously provided to employees by executives. Recognition comprised

private and public "pats on the back" or verbal accolades specific to learning activities. At the micro level, executives rewarded learning with job enlargement. From management's perspective, micro learning led to macro development. Promotions were considered to be the ultimate learning rewards. Employees who were "proven," who were helpful, whose goals were highly congruent with those of the organization, and who were deemed by executives to be valuable to The Company in both the short and long term were more likely to attain extraordinary resources as a reward for their learning.

Subquestion 2

What were employees' perceptions of the circumstances which helped to create learning opportunities in regard to direction and support?

With regard to direction, the FLG members perceived three main contributors to the facilitation of employees' abilities and motivation to be self-directed in learning for the organization. Paradoxically, the first was their need for management to recognize that employees were self-directed to learn for the organization. The second was that employees needed management to know that they were competent at being self-directed learners in terms of being able to self-diagnose what had to be learned, how, and why. The final contributor to the facilitation of their learning for the organization was management's awareness that employees' needs had to be met first. In combination, these contributors point out that employees needed the authority to self-manage their learning processes, ostensibly because they were already motivated to enter into self-directed learning—even on their first day of employment with The Company. The FLG members knew that part of their employment obligation to The Company was to be continuously willing to self-monitor or to change their paradigms. Because they already felt responsible and accountable, authority and anticipated control were the factors which were needed first if self-directed learning for the organization was going to be triggered at all.

With respect to direction, employees appreciated management intervention on two main fronts. The first was to give them authority to control their learning processes. The second was to have executives act as learning guides rather than learning managers. Specifically, employees were more likely to accept management intervention when they were able to choose the executive with whom they could enter and maintain a collaborative learning relationship. When they could not choose in this regard, control collisions or nonparticipative management of learning occurred, thereby influencing the employees to perceive that the manager was not approachable, trusting, and trustworthy. Learning relationships were predicated upon co-direction of the employee's learning process.

In terms of support, the FLG members provided the composite view that a learning atmosphere facilitated both their self-directedness and their self-directed learning choices. Their perception of a learning atmosphere comprised access to information, safety, and equality.

When management afforded employees with the ability to access information, they felt trusted and competent to contribute to the organization. Alternatively, when employees were denied access to information, they were more likely to be unable and less motivated to learn because they could not create choices pertaining to what needed to be learned, how, and why. In the employees' eyes, access to information was the key to building their perception that they were in control of their learning.

In terms of safety, employees were more likely to implement their self-directed learning decisions when they felt that it was possible to experience the consequences of their learning choices fearlessly. Employees' continued motivation to persist in learning was enhanced by their abilities to experiment through trial and error.

The FLG members appreciated executives' modeling of learning behavior because it built the perception that employees were equals to management in terms of being learning partners. What employees took issue with was management's inability to "go all the way": when executives did not model application of employees' outcomes or when they did not implement employee suggestions given what they had learned. Employees experienced low levels of task

identity, task significance, and feedback in terms of learning job characteristics when this occurred. Consequently, employees felt that their learning for the organization had little or no purpose. Employees needed not only support for their self-direction in terms of being able to manage their learning, but they also needed support in terms of knowing that their competency to self-monitor learning was valued by The Company. When management implemented employees' learning outcomes, employees felt equal to managers in terms of being work partners.

Learning and work partnerships between employees and managers were facilitated by the organization's structure. As The Company grew, the distance between executives and employees widened, thereby decreasing employees' abilities to offer their improvement suggestions to management. Consequently, employees also perceived that there would be fewer opportunities for executives to support their learning in this regard. Employees' learning opportunities were facilitated by consistent and continual two-way communication with executives.

The final support mechanism which employees discussed was the recognition and reward system in The Company. Each FLG member recalled instances where at least one executive provided recognition and rewards specific to learning. One primary need, in this regard, was to distribute recognition and rewards equitably between employees and executives. Another was to be secure in the knowledge that recognition and rewards were distributed equitably between employees.

Finally, recognition and rewards had to meet the individual needs; learners had to perceive that they were appropriate. The findings from the FLG members' responses showed that recognition and rewards were perceived to be a support mechanism for learning only when they were not used as a tool to merely increase work efforts. If learning was to be rewarded with more learning opportunities, the subsequent learning also had to meet employees' needs before meeting those of the organization. Learning rewards which tipped the balance of learning decision-making control in favor of management were not considered to be appropriate.

Main Inquiry

What constitutes a learning opportunity in the workplace?

By taking the long way around in discussing those factors which executives and front-line employees considered to facilitate the creation of learning opportunities, the main inquiry can be addressed. In one way or another, the respondents collectively identified Theory Y management principles, participative management, decentralized decision making, two-way communication, access to information, learning safety, and recognition and rewards to constitute potential for learning opportunities in the workplace.

However, the mere existence of these factors was not adequate. They all had to be operationalized in a manner which supported their interdependence. All of these factors combined served to create learning opportunities for employees in terms of giving these learners the ability to create learning choices and to realize the consequences of their decision making in a manner which sparked a desire to persist in learning for the organization. Employees' learning opportunities in the workplace were constituted by those factors which afforded them with the authority to be self-directed (control) to operationalize their own learning plans. This resulted in the development of employee willingness and ability to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for learning and for work.

Fundamentally, Theory Y management tenets had to be practiced by both executives and employees. The belief that both parties were mature and competent to manage and monitor each others' learning was operationalized in terms of the constituting factors mentioned above, with the caveat that employees and executives had to internalize external needs and goals. Employees had to consider those of the organization; executives had to consider those of the employee. Learning opportunities in the workplace were constituted by both executives' and employees' motivation and abilities to co-manage and to co-monitor learning processes needed to effect organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

Conclusions

The following section discusses 11 conclusions which were derived from the findings in this study.

1. In the context of The Company's workplace, Garrison's (1997) conceptualizations of self-management and self-monitoring in SDL are transcended into co-management and co-monitoring of self-directed learning, or the concept of learnership. Learnership is predicated upon two main factors. The first is leadership: Both executives and employees must be learning leaders to some extent. They must practice participative management, decentralized decision making, and two-way communication as means to provide continuous information regarding assessment of each party's contributions, in this regard. The second is learning: Learning for the organization means that executives and employees need to learn from one another and that they must be willing to share authority to control learning processes. Learning for the organization also means that both parties must also be willing to shoulder responsibility and accountability for learning outcomes which resulted from this co-dependent relationship. Garrison's (1997) posits relating to the teacher-learner transaction and its operationalization in the workplace can be further explained by considering the tenets of learnership.

Learnership is a concept which connects the organization, its management leaders, and its employees in terms of shared responsibility to meet one another's needs as a means to continuously manage and monitor learning processes required to effect organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Although not explicitly introduced in the literature, its tenets are supported by Garrison (1997; 1997), Bierema (1996), Medina (1995), Callendar (1992), Brockett and Hiemstra (1985), and Tough (1971), cited in Caffarella (1986). Self-directed learning in the workplace can only be operationalized successfully if executives and employees are responsible and accountable for learning outcomes equally. Consequently, an organization which is built on learnership has both executives and employees acting as stewards for learning for the organization.

Learnership is also predicated upon interrelationships between learning philosophies, management philosophies, and self-directed learning. As Brockett (1994) indicated, self-directed learning is not wholly dependent upon the operationalization of only one set of unique tenets. Employee's abilities to be self-directed are dependent upon organizational tendencies to put humanistic, cognitivist, and social learning philosophies into practice, in conjunction with Theory Y management and participative management perspectives. Consequently, executives and employees need to become familiar with how these posits affect learning activities in the workplace. Quality learnership, then, is based upon executives' and employees' abilities to attain knowledge in this regard and to apply this knowledge in the context for which self-directedness and SDL are to be operationalized.

2. Under the tenets of Theory Y management (Certo, 1997; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996), employees need to enter into self-directed learning with the authority to control their learning processes. It was evident that employees brought with them self-motivation to be self-directed learners; they were ready to engage in self-directed learning to meet organizational goals, and executives also knew this to be true. Consequently, employees needed authority to control the operationalization of their self-directedness in terms of being able to implement their self-directed learning plans. Authority to control personal learning was the factor which boosted employees' willingness to shoulder *more* responsibility and accountability. Based upon employees' characteristics and subsequent predilections to use self-directed learning to meet their personal learning needs and organizational goals, authority to control learning is required first.

3. Process theories of motivation for learning, such as expectancy theory, cannot be considered in isolation from content theories of motivation in the context of The Company's workplace. Employees' goals must be highly congruent with those of the organization before they will enter into self-directed learning (Baskett, 1993), and their goals are predicated upon satisfying their needs. Goal attainment was underscored by the need to have participative management, decentralized decision making, two-way communication, and access to information

operationalized in the workplace. When these needs were fulfilled satisfactorily, equal learning partnerships between employees and management were created. In doing so, their needs for equitable and appropriate learning recognition and rewards also need to be considered. If employees' needs are not met in this regard, it is more likely that they will not be self-directed to create goals which are congruent with those of the organization. Although Garrison's (1997) SDL model addresses personal needs, it does not "go all the way" to identify whether a hierarchy of learning needs or whether the presence or absence of certain learning needs (in the context of circumstances which facilitate the creation of learning opportunities in The Company) influences engagement and persistence in self-directed learning.

4. Self-directedness is different from self-directed learning (Baskett, 1993; Brockett, 1994), and the way in which self-directedness can be operationalized in the workplace can be explained by identifying circumstances which fulfill learners' needs in this regard. The ability to be self-directed is a prelude to the ability to create and implement choices pertaining to self-directed learning plans.

5. Garrison's (1997) teacher-learner transaction has application to the workplace, with limitations. With respect to the findings pertaining to learning relationships, employees need to be able to choose their learning leader, which is not explicitly explained by Garrison's (1997) teacher-learner transaction or the literature on mentoring (Fritz, 1997; Gailbraith & Cohen, 1997; Haney, 1997). The learning leader is chosen based on his or her willingness to co-manage and co-monitor learning processes in addition to being approachable, interested in alternative points of view, trusting, and trustworthy. Based upon the findings generated in this study, the subsequent conclusion is that learning relationships which successfully promote employees' learning for the workplace need to be predicated upon employees' choices to select the appropriate learning leader who they perceive will meet their learning needs.

6. The lack of formality in assessing both employees' and executives' learning is more likely to result in situations where important learning for the organization is not completed and is more likely to result in instances of control collisions, inequality, and inequity (Bierema, 1996;

Caffarella, 1994; Certo, 1997; Cosgrove & Speed, 1995; Fownes, 1997; Gayle, 1990; Geber, 1995; Haney, 1997; Harris, 1998; Knowles, 1989; Mager, 1985; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996; Zemke, 1998; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). Employees' and organizational needs are more likely to be met continuously with the inclusion of some monitoring system for learning so that co-management and co-monitoring of learning can be facilitated without curbing employees' self-directedness (Bierema, 1996).

7. Access to information is the key to motivating self-directed employees to create and implement self-directed learning plans (Garrison, 1997a; 1997b). The findings show that without access to information, employees were less likely to enter into self-directed learning for two main reasons. First, they were not able to determine what was needed to self-manage their learning processes. Second, a lack of information built employees' perceptions that they were not trusted to make decisions at strategic levels of organizational development planning, which undermined their propensity to act as stewards in this regard (Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Wright et al., 1996). Access to information motivated employees to shoulder more responsibility and accountability for their learning.

8. The tenets pertaining to the job characteristics theory (Schermerhorn et al., 1997) have strong application to employees' learning for the workplace. If learning jobs are to be satisfying, learners must perceive that these jobs have high degrees of autonomy, task significance, task identity, skill variety, and feedback.

9. Organizational growth plays a role in determining the extent to which participative management, decentralized decision making, two-way communication, and recognition and rewards are operationalized to support employees' learning jobs (Bierema, 1996; Schermerhorn et al., 1997). The more executives are obsessed with growth, the less likely it is that they have the time to interact with employees, and the less likely it is that management will contribute to the enhancement of employees' learning jobs.

10. The Company was more likely to reward employees for knowing than for learning itself (Spikes, 1995). In The Company, "proven" learners were those employees who attained

high levels of knowledge which benefited the organization. Consequently, they were more likely to be rewarded with more learning opportunities. Under the tenets of Theory Y management philosophy, all employees should be considered as mature and competent (Argyris, 1957; cited in Starke & Sexty, 1998) learners who need recognition and rewards in this respect, regardless of their tenure, helpfulness, and long-term value to The Company. It is more likely that unproven learners will become proven learners when they are treated equitably.

The mere existence of recognition and rewards was not enough to satisfy employees' needs in this regard; they also had to be appropriate in terms of meeting individualized needs. The perception of inequity on behalf of some FLG members was due in part to the executives' realization that all employees could not be treated in the same way (Harris, 1998). However, this did not mitigate executives' practices of "bending the rules" in terms of how they acquired scarce company resources for their own learning.

11. There were gaps in the literature pertaining to the interdependence of human resource management theory and adult learning theory as they are operationalized in the context of learning for the workplace (Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Certo, 1997; Gagne & Medsker, 1996; Garrison, 1997; 1997; Knowles, 1989; Marsick & Watkins, 1993, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Rothwell & Sredl; 1992; Schermerhorn et al., 1997; Starke & Sexty, 1998; Watkins, 1995; Watkins & Marsick, 1992; Wright et al., 1996). Generally speaking, theories pertaining to the management of human resources apply to how adult learning theory can be put into use in the workplace. Adult learning theory serves to show how and why learners are predisposed to being self-directed in learning for the organization. In terms of learning for the workplace, these concepts are actually interdependent. This co-dependency points to the subsequent conclusion that it is more likely that practitioners of adult education in the workplace—those involved in maintaining organizational learnership—would be able to understand why and how learning occurs if adult learning theory were to be explained in the parlance of human resource management.

Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions reached in this study, the following section discusses four main recommendations for practice and two recommendations for theory.

Recommendations for Practice

Based upon the findings and conclusions in this study, the first recommendation relates to the subject of monitoring systems. Had there been ways and means to continuously measure both executives' and employees' interventions in learning for the workplace, the anomalies pertaining to control collisions, inequality, and inequity might have been eliminated. The literature supported the inclusion of some type of system which specifically targets issues surrounding activities that satisfy employees' and the organization's learning needs. It is because of these differences that such systems are required. If they are administered properly—that is, collaboratively between executives and employees—monitoring systems will help to ensure that both parties are fulfilling their negotiated roles in terms of learnership.

The second recommendation for practice further relates to the issue of learnership. In order for executives and employees to fully understand and operationalize the intricacies associated with self-directedness and self-directed learning, these learning leaders must attain more knowledge pertaining to management of human resources and to adult learning theory. Further, they must synthesize this knowledge in a manner which furthers learning in the context of their workplace. To this end, I suggest that each of The Company's staff members be responsible for researching, presenting, and leading discussions on adult learning theory as it can be operationalized in their workplace.

With respect to practice, the third recommendation is to have executives and employees specifically state what their learning needs are as a means to determine the circumstances for goal congruency between individual learners and the organization so that subsequent goal attainment can be achieved to benefit employees and The Company.

The fourth, and final, recommendation for practice relates to rewarding employees for "knowing" rather than learning. Employees who are new to an organization might not be able to break into the cycle of learning support as it was operationalized in The Company because they might be perceived by executives to be less mature and competent. These circumstances contradict the tenets of Theory Y management philosophy because new personnel have most likely brought with them the desire and competency to be self-directed learners for the organization at the start of their employment relationship. However, the findings indicate that new personnel are less likely to receive more learning opportunities until they become proven learners, but they cannot become proven learners unless they receive both extraordinary and ordinary resources to do so. This "Catch-22" situation actually minimizes rather than maximizes an employee's motivation to take responsibility and be accountable for using self-directed learning for the organization, because his or her propensity to act on behalf of the organization might not be supported by executives until much later in the organization-employee relationship.

Recommendations for Theory

Under this heading, recommendations for theory have more to do with identifying the circumstances which I see will attend to the co-dependency of management theory and adult learning theory and this relationship's influence on self-directedness and self-directed learning in the workplace. To this end, two main recommendations to theory are provided.

As was noted in the "Conclusions" section of this study, there is a gap in the literature pertaining to how self-directedness and SDL can be operationalized in the workplace. Employees needs in terms of the circumstances required to facilitate self-directedness and self-directed learning have not been fully explained by the literature thus far. Consequently, I suggest that research pertaining to the interdependence of management theory and adult learning theory be pursued because, undoubtedly, there seems to be a relationship between these two constructs.

Whereas the intent of this study was not to examine specific learning needs, the conclusions drawn from the research at hand point to the possibility that content theories of motivation also have strong application to self-directed learning for the workplace in conjunction with the process theory of expectancy. Further research in this area might serve to augment Garrison's (1997) SDL model, specifically.

The findings from this study suggest that there might be a learning needs hierarchy which has not been identified in the literature. Figure 6.1 illustrates possible parallels between Maslow's theory and the factors which were found to constitute learning opportunities in The Company.

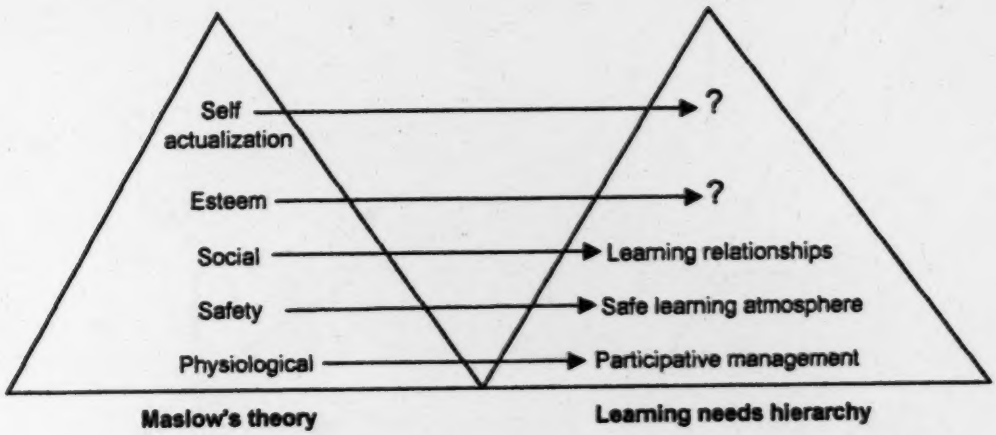

Figure 6.1. **Maslow's theory and possible parallels to a learning needs hierarchy.**

Participative management was described by the respondents as a basic learning need, because without it employees would not be able to contribute to decision-making processes regarding management of their learning. In the Company, participative management was constituted by two-way communication, which leads to my speculation that within each major category there might also be subsets of needs which are to be fulfilled.

Employees' need to take risks in safe environments is likely parallel to Maslow's safety needs because both have to do with the individual's perception that he or she is free from

psychological or physical harm (Starke & Sexty, 1998). When The Company's employees felt safe, they were more likely to enter into learning relationships with executives. When an employee did not feel safe, he or she fell back into the participative management stage of the learning needs hierarchy to reconfirm knowledge that he or she was able to control personal learning.

Finally, learning relationships seem to intersect with Maslow's conceptualization of social needs because it is here where employees met their needs to belong to a group which continually shared information. It is possible that the need for access to information might also have applicability at this level, because without it, employees were not free from psychological harm; management thought they were too immature to make competent decisions.

The findings from this study did not suggest the existence of parallels to Maslow's esteem and self-actualization needs for the learning needs hierarchy. Continued research in this area would serve to enhance information surrounding my speculations in this respect, while adding to the literature regarding potential applications of Maslow's theory to learning for the workplace.

Personal Reflections

Generally speaking, the findings pointed to anomalies to The Company's otherwise careful and successful consideration of employees' needs to be self-directed and to implement their self-directed learning plans as a means to improve and increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Consequently, I believe that this organization, its executives, and its employees have, for the most part, fulfilled their learnership roles admirably. Specifically, these executives have applied their knowledge to motivate and enable employees to learn for the organization by affording these learners the authority to control their learning processes. Consequently, employees have become more responsible and accountable for learning which motivates executives to meet employees' needs on an ongoing basis. The existence of shared authority and control means that employees' and managers' activities in this regard are self-

reinforcing. There was no evidence to support executives' practice of scientific or mechanistic philosophies, either for employees' work or their learning for work. In my estimation, The Company was fully entrenched in modern management practices for work and for learning, a finding which I found to be refreshing in light of my experiences in organizations which were teacher-centered and which overly directed employees' learning. Consequently, recommendations for practice were offered to enhance what was already activated in The Company.

Although I was inclined to believe that overdirection of employees' learning in the workplace led to their unwillingness and inability to learn for the organization, the activities surrounding the completion of this study tell me why these situations occurred, in more specific terms. It is my sincere hope that other managers who have experienced frustration because their employees are not applying what the organization has taught them take heed, if not for their own benefit, then for the benefit of the employees and the organization as a whole.

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction to The Company

Date:

To:

From: Cheryl Boychuk

The content of this document will give you a general briefing about why I am so interested in your company. I am hoping that you will allow me to work with you and your company to complete a project under the supervision of the University of Alberta. I am currently trying to complete my thesis research on Learning Opportunities in the Workplace, as a Masters of Adult and Higher Education student. I would like to work with your company because of your recent achievement in winning the Jean B. Forest award, which shows that there is a high level of knowledge about the concept of learning in your workplace. Congratulations!

I wanted to be in this academic program because I have experience and interest in working with different facets of human resource development, including adult learning. For over ten years, I worked as a supervisor and manager of different departments of ED TEL (pre-Telus). Parts of my various portfolios were to help design and deliver training and various educational programs to internal and external customers. Regardless of the many other tasks that I had to complete, the teaching components were always my favorite.

While working for ED TEL, I acquired a Bachelor of Commerce Degree from the UofA and a certificate in Management Studies from Grant MacEwan College. Enrolling in this masters program has given me the opportunity to meld adult learning with business. That is why learning in the workplace is of interest to me. I think that people engage in learning at work when they feel that an opportunity arises. What I want to find out, is what constitutes a learning opportunity, from people who know what learning is. From an academic perspective, I want to be able to test theories surrounding adult learning. From a practical angle, I want to learn more about how to help adults learn. My goals are to teach human resource development at a post secondary education institution and to consult with businesses to help create and deliver educational programs for their clients. Therefore, my responsibility is to learn as much as I can about what I want to do.

I think that having the opportunity to be involved with an organization which has an inclination to looking toward the future will add to my own and others' education. Your company has completed many of the pivotal steps required for furthering knowledge of adult learning. Contributions to research will help academia and the learning community in general, gain a better understanding of the importance and impact of learning in the workplace. On the next page, you will find an outline of how the research will be operationalized.

I am hoping that you will give me permission to work with you in this endeavor. Please contact me at (403) 467-4953 by telephone or fax or at e-mail address wind47@planet.eon.net, if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Boychuk

Appendix B: Research Outline Provided to The Company

Research Outline

I will be the primary data collector and analyzer. To start, I would like to job shadow a person who you believe is the most knowledgeable about The Company and who would like to spend some time orienting me. Within a period of no more than five consecutive workdays, or the duration that you recommend, I will simply observe what is happening and take notes. I may ask questions about the situation at hand, but my intent is to watch and listen rather than become an active participant in any conversations. The first part of the data collection then, is to find out about the nature of the business and the roles and responsibilities of the employees, as a means to determine who the respondents for the interviews will be. I do not plan on directly interacting with any of your clients.

I would like to have all employees consent to being potentially involved in the observation period. Therefore, before the observation period commences, I will ask all employees to sign an Informed Consent Form. If any individual does not sign, that means that anything he or she says or does will not be recorded or included in the thesis. If anyone provides consent and then changes his or her mind, that person can opt out of the study. Opting out means that contributions will not be published in the thesis.

The primary data collection segment will consist of interviewing some of The Company's employees. During the observation period, I will select a maximum of five and privately, ask them if they wish to be interviewed at a later date. An Informed Consent Form for Interviews will be used, here. The interviews are expected to take approximately 45 minutes. They will be conducted away from the company setting to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. If an individual who is interviewed decides to opt out of the study, he or she may do so by contacting me.

In order to address the ethical aspects of the research, all real names of all participants will be disguised using pseudonyms in any written documentation or verbal discussions. Any public documents derived from working with your company will be written in a manner to conceal participants' identities. Therefore, the extent to which you participate in this study and the content of your contributions will only be known to me. All contributions, whether made during the observation period, the interview or both will be kept strictly confidential, by me.

After the data has been collected it will be analyzed and then written about in an approved thesis format. The entire thesis production process will be closely monitored by professionals at the University of Alberta, so I can guarantee that a quality product will result.

If you have any questions, please contact me at telephone or fax number (403) 467-4953 or at e-mail address wind47@planet.eon.net. Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix C: Interview Schedule for Executives

Interview Schedule for Executive Managers

Building Rapport

1. How did you get to be in this business?
2. What are your roles and responsibilities?
3. What is your educational background?

Learning

4. Describe any learning objectives that you have for your employees.
5. What do you think motivates your employees to learn?
6. What does a person need to learn to work here?
7. How does a person know that they have to learn?
8. How do you help your employees learn?
9. What keeps employees from learning?
10. How is learning recognized?

Learning Opportunities

11. What are the characteristics of a learning opportunity?
12. How are learning opportunities created?

Appendix D: Interview Schedules for Front-Line Employees

Interview Schedule for Front-Line Employees

Building Rapport

1. What year were you born in?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What are your roles and responsibilities at work?
4. How long have you worked here?
5. Why are you still working here?

Learning

6. What learning objectives do you have to meet?
7. What motivates you to meet these objectives?
8. How does this company help you learn?
9. What keeps you from learning?
10. How is learning recognized?

Learning Opportunities

11. What are the characteristics of a learning opportunity?
12. How are learning opportunities created?